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## **Stranger Things Than Dungeons and Dragons by Commandant Lupus Ignis**

**Category:** Stranger Things, 2016

**Genre:** Romance, Sci-Fi

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Dustin H., J. Hopper, Mike W., OC

**Status:** In-Progress

**Published:** 2019-12-06 23:38:56

**Updated:** 2019-12-17 10:11:11

**Packaged:** 2019-12-17 14:32:57

**Rating:** T

**Chapters:** 10

**Words:** 46,653

**Publisher:** [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)

**Summary:** The night of November sixth in 1983 started like any other. Our party enjoying themselves in a basement while playing Dungeons and Dragons. Nothing strange there, right? With the disappearance of one of their own, and many other strange things happening in their town, a group of friends is going to have to work quick to figure out what is going on and save those they hold dear.

# 1. Dungeons and Dragons

**I'm back again! Here we go with a new series in my list of things written for, Stranger Things!**

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Crickets chirped loudly outside of a normal household, only to be drowned out by the hum and chirp of a sprinkler as it sprays water too and fro.

"Something is coming. Something hungry for blood."

A dark haired boy peers over the top of a book. "A shadow grows on the wall behind you, swallowing you in darkness. It is almost here." Spoke a young Michael Wheeler as he stared back at his friends in intimidation.

Around a table that held the board game Dungeons and Dragons sat the five friends, four of which turned to each other at their Dungeon Masters words.

"What is it?" Young Will Byers questioned, turning back to Mike for an answer.

"What if it's the Demogorgon? Oh, Jesus, we're so screwed if it's the Demogorgon." A boy wearing a hat atop curly hair by the name of Dustin Henderson lamented as he pressed his hand to his forehead in fear.

The other three playing along with him either rolled their eyes or ignored their friend's reaction to the possibility of a Demogorgon. "It's not the Demogorgon." Lucas Sinclair sat across from Dustin, enunciating his words with his hands as he disagreed with his friend.

"An army of Troglydites charge into the chamber!" Mike announces as he loudly slams a figurine on the table in front of him and his friends.

Everyone looks relieved by the reveal, except of course Mike and the only other friend not to speak.

"Troglodytes?" Dustin asked, smirking at Mike because of how easy it will be to overcome the weak opponents.

"Told ya!" Lucas bragged before giggling, Dustin and Will joining him as their fears dissipated at not having to face the Demogorgon.

"I wouldn't let your guard down just yet." The last member of the party finally spoke up from where she sat between Will and Dustin, leaning forward with her chin propped on folded tan hands as she stared back at Mike.

Erin Wakeman knew Mike well enough after all these years to know when he sent something weak like Troglodytes in that he was preparing for something even grander. It was a front, which usually would be followed by something far worse.

Mike, on cue, dawned a nervous expression. "Wait a minute." Mike muttered softly as he turned away from them while Erin covered her knowing smile behind her fingertips. "Did you hear that?" Mike asked as he turned his head to look behind him.

"That... that sound... Boom... Boom... Boom!" Mike slammed his open palms against the table with the final boom, the other four jerking at the sudden loud bang of the table.

"That didn't come from the troglodytes. No, that... That came from something else." Mike revealed to the party as he peered over the book at them.

Will, Dustin, Lucas and Erin each exchanged a look of fear and anticipation of what Mike was planning, before with a loud bang Mike slammed another figurine on the table before them.

"The Demogorgon!" Mike announced, the other boys groaning out loud at the monster they now were faced with.

"I told you." Erin reminded as she threw her hands up in the air from how Mike threw them into hot water so willingly.

"We're in deep shit." Dustin groaned as he pressed a hand to his face.

"Will! You're action?" Mike demanded action from their magic user,

who immediately panicked from being put on the spot against a Demogorgon.

"I don't know!" Will whined as he leaned into the table more.

"Fireball him!" Lucas demanded, waving a hand towards the Demogorgon on the table in front of them.

"I'd have to roll a thirteen or higher!" Will advised the knight of their party, staring down at the figurine in front of him.

"Too risky. Cast a protection spell." Dustin offered instead, hoping to god that Will makes the right choice.

"Don't be a pussy. Fireball him!" Lucas demanded once more instead, more forceful than the last time.

"Cast protection." Dustin only repeated the right action as he glared down Lucas for such an absurd suggestion.

Mike slammed his hands on the table loudly once again. "The Demogorgon is tired of your silly human bickering! It stomps towards you. Boom!" Mike announced dramatically as the other four panicked around him.

"Fireball him!" Lucas pleaded with Will this time.

"Another stomp, boom!"

"Cast Protection." Dustin reminded, looking to the Elf player between himself and Will for help to sway Will's decision.

"He roars in anger!" Mike yells over them before Lucas and Dustin start yelling across the table at one another.

"Cast protection." Erin advised in the middle of the chaos, but it went on deaf ears as a second later Will made his decision.

"Fireball!" Will announces before rolling the dice onto the table quickly.

....Only for the dice to them go skittering off the table and onto the

floor.

"Oh shit!" Will snaps as the five of them leap out of their seats to find the dice quickly.

"Where'd it go?" Lucas questioned aloud as he looked around the basement floor for the dice. "Where is it?" Lucas asked as he and Will scurried to look for the dice.

"I don't know." Will drops to his knees to look around on the floor.

"Is it a thirteen?" Dustin and Erin both asked at the same time, Dustin the last up from the table while Erin was already crawling around on the floor beside Mike in search.

"I don't know!"

"Where is it?"

"Mike!" A shout came from up the stairs.

"Oh, my god! Oh, my god! Oh, my god! Oh, my god!" Dustin paced the floor holding his head in fear of the outcome of the roll while the other four continued searching.

"Mike!" The shout was louder this time.

"Can you find it yet?" Lucas asked as he bumped into Mike in the search.

"I can't find it!" Erin complained while starting to search further away from the table.

"Neither can I!" Will lamented and followed the black haired girls lead of searching farther away.

"Mike!" The door at the top of the stairs opened to reveal Mikes mom, Karen Wheeler, as the kids continued their hunt for the dice.

"Mom, we're in the middle of a campaign!" Mike reminded her from his kneeling position in front of the stairs, arms waved out around him in expression.

"Oh, you mean the end? Fifteen after." Karen reminded her son with a tap on her wrist before turning around and walking away.

"Oh, my god! Freaking idiot!" Lucas snapped in the background as Mike jumped up and ran up the stairs after his Mom.

"Why do we have to go?" Will protested as Mike calling after his mom could be heard from up the stairs.

"How long have we been down here?" Erin asked as she continued searching with Will. Finally, luck decided to shine on them though.

"Oh, I got it!" Will yelled as he snatched up the dice at last. "Does a seven count?" Will asked as he regrouped with Lucas and Dustin, who were getting ready to leave.

"It was a seven?" Lucas asked as Erin scooted around him to grab her things and try to ignore the bad roll. "Did Mike see it?" Will shook his head. "Then it doesn't count." Lucas clarified for Will.

Will joined the other three in getting ready to head home for the night.

With coats on and bags hanging on their backs, Lucas started up the stairs followed by Will and Erin.

"Yo, hey, guys." Dustin drew their attention back as he held up the almost empty box of pizza they had been eating earlier. "Does anyone want this?" Dustin asked as he held the box up towards the three.

"No." Lucas and Will answered at the same time.

"Why not ask Nancy." Erin offered, making kissing noises towards Dustin as Lucas snickered from up the stairs.

"Good idea." Dustin said with a tilt of his head before racing up the stairs after her when she followed after the others.

Erin followed him up towards Nancy's room just to see the reaction that would come from Mike's big sister, Dustin standing in the door and waving towards the teenage girl as Erin stood behind him. "Barb, no, I don't think so." Nancy either didn't notice them due to her

phone call or didn't care.

"Hey, Nancy." Dustin called her name, and this time earned her attention. "There's a slice left if you want it. Sausage and pepperoni!" Dustin offered, Nancy rolling her eyes at him before telling Barb to hold on as she stood from her bed.

Walking towards them, Erin stepped beside Dustin with a face splitting grin to match his own toothless one. Right up until Nancy smiled back at them and slammed the door in their faces.

Dustin let the pizza box fall shut as he waved his hand in exasperation to being shut out, Erin snickering at him up until he looked at her with narrowed eyes. With a snort, she turned and ran back down the stairs.

Will and Lucas just got on their bikes when Erin made it outside and hopped on her own beside Will, Dustin arriving not a minute later. "There's something wrong with your sister." Dustin said the moment he walked out, still sour about the encounter.

"What are you talking about?" Mike asked as Dustin walked past him to get on his bike.

"She's got a stick up her butt." Dustin clarified before picking up his bike and hopping on.

"Yeah." Lucas agreed with Dustin as he looked towards Mike. "It's because she's been dating that douche bag, Steve Harrington." Lucas said as Mike rolled his eyes at two of his best friends words.

"Hey, at least you guys aren't babysat by him." Erin reminded, Will snickering beside her as they all turned on the lights on their bikes.

"Yeah, she's turning into a real jerk." Dustin continued on his rant about the girl who spurned his kind gesture.

"She's always been a real jerk." Mike argued instead, turning to Erin for her agreement since she was around Nancy the most of all with how often she was over.

"I have to agree with Mike. You guys just can't see past the pretty



face." Erin argued on Mike's side, earning a disgusted look in turn from Mike but Dustin and Lucas looking at her ready to argue. When all she did was make a kissing sound yet again, they turned back around.

"Nuh-uh, she used to be cool. Like that time she dressed up as an elf for our Elder Tree campaign." Dustin said before rolling out of the garage and down the driveway with Lucas right behind him.

"Four years ago!" Mike yelled after Dustin before he could get away.

"Just saying!" Dustin called back to him before he was gone.

"Later!" Lucas bid his farewell before he too was gone.

"Night, Mike!" Erin said with a smile before following after the other two, leaving Will behind with him.

"It was a seven." Erin rolled her eyes as she faintly heard Will reveal what the roll had been to Mike.

Catching back up with the other two was no hard task, peddling up behind Lucas as they weaved around before Will too caught up. Before long, they were at Lucas' stop.

"Good night, ladies." Lucas said with a wave goodbye to his three best friends.

"Kiss your mom 'night for me." Dustin called after him before pulling ahead of Will and Erin as the other two made sounds of disgust at his words.

Seconds later, he turned to the other two with a grin.

"Race back to my place? Winner gets a comic." Dustin offered, Will looking over Dustin's shoulder at Erin before they nodded in agreement to the terms.

"Any comic?" Will asked as they each peddled side by side.

"Yeah." Dustin agreed as he looked to Erin on his other side.

With a nod, Will and Erin started to peddle ahead of Dustin.

"Hey! Hey! I didn't say go!" Dustin shouted after them as they raced off ahead of him.

"Get back here!"

"Make us!"

Will started to pull ahead as they reached a hill.

"I'm gonna kill you!" Dustin shouted after Will, his voice carrying throughout the neighborhood.

"I'll take your X-Men 134!" Will called back as he shot past Dustin's house, Erin slowing her peddle as she neared the Henderson mailbox to give Dustin a chance to catch up.

Huffing and puffing, he came to a stop beside her a second later with a defeated sigh. "Son of a bitch." Dustin moaned as he tried to catch his breath, leaning on his handlebars before looking to the girl beside him.

"Guess you're one comic short now. Night, Dusty." Erin teased, sticking her tongue out at him as she circled her bike around him before going across the street to her own house.

"Yeah, yeah. Kiss your babysitter night, tiny little Hobbit." Dustin waved her off before starting up his driveway.

"I heard that, you rock loving Dwarf!" Dustin snorted at the shout he got back for the comment.

This was a normal night for the five best friends of Hawkins, Indiana. Spending the day in the basement of Mike's home while playing Dungeons and Dragons was one of their favorite past times.

Mike Wheeler, as the Dungeon Master, would lead Will the Wise, Lucas the Knight, Dustin the Dwarf and Erin the Elf on many a grand adventure together.

Hundreds of campaigns and even more so hours spent on their

games, they were all the best of friends. Nothing would ever change that.

But no one could have ever predicted that this night in particular would start the beginning of a change, one that no one could have ever seen coming.

This night would make them wish that the old days never ended.

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"Do you like Dungeons and Dragons?" A fourth grade Mike Wheeler asked the new kid of his class as his old friends stood around him, or in case of their one girl she stood behind him holding the back of his shirt.

The new kid, who held a unique lack of teeth that the rest of them had long since grown in and most kids were even starting to lose them to permanent teeth, tilted his head at him in response as he tucked a book into his bag. "You know what Dungeons and Dragons is? No one at my old school did!" This new kid went by the name Dustin, his parents having just moved them all to Hawkins, Indiana.

"Of course we know what it is, what are the kids at your old school a bunch of knuckleheads?" Lucas questioned as he raised his nose at how a different school didn't know the wonder of the game.

Mike turned to Lucas, but before he could yell at his best friend for ruining his chance to get a new member in their party Will stepped towards Dustin.

"Hi, I'm Will Byers." Will held a hand out to Dustin with a big, warm smile that could make anyone having a bad day smile.

"My names Dustin Henderson." Dustin introduced, shaking Will's hand before Mike stepped forward to greet him as well.

"My name's Mike Wheeler. This is Lucas."

"I can say my own name!"

Mike glared at Lucas beside him as Lucas stepped up and shook Dustin's hand.

"Lucas Sinclair, I'm our parties Knight when we play." Lucas introduced himself with a proud smile. "What do you play as?" Lucas asked, not lessening his critical view of the new boy who Mike and Will were trying to introduce into their already perfectly fine friend group.

"I'm a Dwarf." Dustin revealed with a proud smile of his own now, turning to Mike as he heard a snort of amusement come from his way.

"Oh, this is Erin Wakeman." Mike gestured behind his back to where the only girl that didn't call them nerds or mock them was hiding behind him.

Dustin tilted his head to the side to see a small girl with black hair and the brightest blue eyes he's ever seen look back at him. "Hi!" Dustin greeted her with a big smile before remembering that no one here knew about his Cleidocranial Dysplasia. He braced for the oncoming taunts or laughing he was used to from his last school.

Instead, he was greeted by a tilt of her head away from Mike to look back at him. Curiosity filled her once nervous gaze instead.

"She doesn't talk much." Lucas spoke up instead of teasing him, rolling his eyes at how even after her having been here for a while now she still didn't really talk. At least not out in public like this.

"She's shy, Lucas." Mike reminded, always the first to defend their most recent addition to the party. She's been with them since she came to town two years ago. Hopefully, this new kid will be their next addition though.

"That's alright, I get it." Dustin assured, while not shy himself he has known plenty of shy kids from his old school.

"Dwarves are inferior." All four boys turned their heads quickly when the shy girl actually spoke, Mike even stepping to the side to look at her fully.

Lucas began snickering behind a hand to his mouth as Mike and Will just stared at her in shock for the random comment about Dwarves.

"Excuse me?" Dustin asked, just staring back at her for her comment about his D&D race.

"I'm sure she was just kidding." Mike reasoned, looking to Erin to correct herself so they don't risk a potential new friend.

She just stared back at him for a moment before setting her gaze on the new boy instead. "Dwarves are inferior." Erin repeated herself, speaking up this time.

Now Will began giggling along with Lucas as they each took a step back from the scene unfolding.

"Let me guess, are you an Elf?" Dustin asked instead, narrowing his eyes at the girl that was supposedly shy. When she nodded her head, he snorted before rubbing his nose. "Of course you are, you're just jealous of us Dwarves like you've always been." Dustin teased, smirking down at the blue eyed girl that challenged his race in the first place.

"Hey can we not?" Mike interrupted them, because while he was surprised that Erin was being so bold at school for once he really wanted to make a new friend today.

"Jealous?" Erin spoke again instead of taking Mike's hint not to ruin this. "Why would an *Eldar* be jealous of a *Khuzd*?" Erin asked, standing up more confidently and speaking more passionately than the other three boys who knew her were used to seeing her do when out in public.

"Oh, here she goes." Lucas sighed and pressed a hand to his forehead.

"Erin please don't." Mike begged, more than willing to let her get her love of Elves and Lord of the Rings or the Hobbit out later when they have a new party member.

"You know the Hobbit and the Lord of the Rings?" Dustin was unfazed by her though, instead very excited that there was someone else who read the books that he's loved since first he read them.

"We all do." Will admitted with a small smile, laughing softly when Erin's confidence over her favorite books faded and she once again

hid against Mike for safety.

"So...do you want to come over? We were about to start planning for our next campaign." Mike revealed, relieved he wasn't scared away by Erin.

"Sure!" Dustin said excitedly, slinging his backpack over his shoulders.

"I honestly didn't expect this to go so well." Will admitted to Lucas as Mike walked out of the classroom with Dustin, both talking about the now up and coming campaign that would involve their new friend.

"You know Mike. He can make anyone a friend if he really wants to." Lucas said with a shrug as they followed after their leader.

"As long as they like the same stuff we do." Erin piped up from beside Will this time, far safer near them now than near the newcomer.

"You didn't even know what Dungeons and Dragons or Lord of the Rings was before you got here." Lucas reminded Erin with a knowing smirk, as the three of them had to teach her a lot when she first joined them two years previous.

"You learned quick though. You're a true Elf." Will complimented, smiling widely at Erin as she smiled right back at him.

"Better than a Dwarf." Both Lucas and Will snorted in amusement at her very elf like disdain for the Dwarves, before looking back ahead at their Dungeon Master and their parties new Dwarf.

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And so began the brightest of friendships in Hawkins. When a party of four became five, it grew not only in size but in friendship and happiness. If you asked any of them, they would say it truly felt complete when their last member arrived.

So began the countless campaigns and endless hours in Mikes basement, and many more hours of running off outside to role play as their characters or explore the area of their town that they unofficially renamed Mirkwood.

In honor of their favorite books that brought them closer together.

Racing off into the summer night to catch fireflies or polliwogs, coming home scraped up and dirty to parents who now were used to it. Hiding out in Mikes basement from the bullies who didn't understand any of them, either playing their favorite game or just hanging out.

Competing in the Science Fair all together at school and winning almost every time. Having their own club all to themselves, well minus Mr. Clarke but he was one of their favorite adults so he was always welcome.

Having many many debates about Dungeons and Dragons or books that they read, that sometimes had to end with shaking hands and just letting it go because they weren't required to share the same opinions just because they were best friends.

Some people would say you can only truly have one Best Friend, there is only room for one. But if you ask the party, one isn't anywhere near enough or okay by them.

They each had four best friends.

Five was the perfect number for them, and they wouldn't have it any other way.

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Everything has to change eventually though. The party may not want it, but it's going to happen.

And it just so happens it's going to happen tonight. Even as Mike settles in for bed, or Lucas yells back and forth across his house at his little sister.

Or Dustin wishes his turtle Yurtle goodnight as he settles in bed with a book. Even Erin, who tries everything in her might to get her babysitter Steve to go back to his own house.

Because on the night of November 6th, 1983, a night that started out just like any other night, Will Byers disappeared without a trace.

So sparking the beginning of the change of their lives, and the ultimate test of their friendships.

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*Wow it has been a while since I've started a new story! I couldn't help myself this time though, it's Stranger Things! Who can honestly resist! Not to mention the common referencing they make of one of my favorite series of all time, as shown by the Eldar and Khuzd.*

*Now, I always hate the first chapter of any story I write because it's me getting the base in and I'm always dissatisfied with it. I promise though, it'll get better if you didn't much care for this! Please, give it a chance and forgive me as I get myself back into the sway of writing again! It's been a while!*

*I'm new to writing for this series, but I hope you enjoyed it so far! I'm not going to have a set update schedule for this story just yet as I've done with other stories in the past, I'm very busy during daytime and also in the process of trying to pick new software to write with. But if I can I'll try to update at least once a week.*

*Thank you so much for reading and thanks even more if you'll be willing to come back for the next chapter. I promise, it'll be better and not as drawn out as this one was. I hope to see you next time!*

*Oh, before I forget, please feel free to give suggestions for a better title for this story. I've basically just settled with the one I've got because I suck at naming my work, so please give any ideas you have! Who knows, you might even give the new name for this!*



## 2. The Disappearance of Will Byers

A knock on the Wheelers front door pulls Karen away from setting out breakfast for her family, smiling when she opened it to see one of her favorite meal time guests. "Good morning, sweetie. Come on in." Karen opened the door for Erin before giving her a quick hug.

"My parents should be home soon, you don't have to-"

"Nonsense, you know how much we love having you." Karen dismissed Erin's attempt to be courteous without hesitation, loving having her over. It's like having another daughter.

After ushering her into the dining room, she went back to setting the table for her family. Plus one.

"Morning, Mike." Erin greeted as he tiredly dragged himself into the room and sat down beside her.

"Morning." Mike greeted through a yawn, pulling his glass of orange juice to him to take a drink.

Before long the rest of the family joined them to eat breakfast. Erin watched as Mike poured syrup onto his eggs, raising an eyebrow at the odd idea he came up with.

"That's disgusting." Nancy commented as the phone rang in the background.

"You're disgusting." Mike retaliated, taking a bite of his syrup covered eggs for emphasis. Erin almost gagged at the idea.

Until Mike reached over and poured syrup onto Nancy's eggs, who opened her mouth in shock at what her little brother did.

"What the hell, Mike?!" Nancy snapped at him as Mike and Erin snickered together.

"Hey!"

"Quiet!"

"Language!"

"Are you kidding?" Nancy turned to her dad with an appalled look at how she was in trouble when it was Mike that ruined her eggs.

"Will? No, no, no, that's just the kids."

Mike and Erin continued giggling at Nancy's annoyance, completely missing Karen mentioning their friends name.

"Just because you want syrup on your food doesn't mean you can ruin mine!" Nancy snapped at Mike, who then reached over and poured syrup onto Erin's toast as she was about to take a bite.

"Hey!"

"Mike knock it off!"

"Quiet, kids! No, he left here a little bit after eight. Why, he's not home?" Karen continued on with her phone call as Erin glared Mike down for ruining her cinnamon toast.

Mike just continued laughing like it was the funniest thing in the world to ruin the girls food, up until Erin kicked his shin under the table. "Hey!"

"Mouth breather."

"Knucklehead."

"Brats!"

"Hey, stop it all of you!" Ted demanded the children to stop as he dropped his newspaper onto the table and stared all three of them down.

"Why am I the one who gets in trouble?" Nancy snapped back at her father, Mike and Erin beginning to scarf down their food quick to avoid the impending debacle that would come from Nancy sassing back.

As they were about to head out the door to school, Mike's mom

stopped them. "That was Will's mom on the phone. She thinks he went to school early today since he wasn't home this morning, so when you see him tell him to go down to the office and call his mom." Karen asked of the two twelve year old kids as they exchanged a look at the strange situation Will put himself in.

"Okay, bye!" And the two were gone to head to school.

Peddling off on their bikes to get to school, they soon were joined by Lucas and Dustin. "Did you guys get a call from Will's mom this morning?" Lucas asked as he rode between Mike and Erin.

"Yeah, she called in the middle of breakfast. We didn't really notice." Erin said with a quick glare at a now smirking Mike.

"What did he do?" Dustin asked as he looked between the two.

Erin rolled her eyes at Mike when he just turned to her to wait for her to give the reveal, speeding up to get to school before them.

"Hey wait up!"

The ride to school was short from their neighborhood, the kids peddling around fellow students with ease until they were pulling into the bike racks like they do every morning.

"That's weird. I don't see him." Mike commented after they all locked their bikes up.

"I'm telling you, his Mom's right. He probably just went to class early again." Lucas reminded as they started to walk away from the bike rack.

"Yeah, he's always paranoid Gursky's gonna give him another pop quiz." Dustin mused as he trailed behind the other three, Erin snorting at his comment which in turn made him snicker a bit himself as he stepped up beside her.

"Step right up, ladies and gentlemen."

All four kids tensed up at the voice that interrupted what was actually a decent morning, turning to face the biggest bullies of their

school. Troy and James.

"Step right up and get your tickets for the freak show. Who do you think would make more money in a freak show?" Troy asked with a sadistic grin as he stood before the four friends.

Troy took a step closer until he was close enough that each of them could actually smell his putrid breath. "Midnight?" Troy punched Lucas in the shoulder hard enough to make him take a step back.

"Frog Face?" Repeated the same action to Mike, who kept his eyes down and off the bully.

"Toothless?" Once again, he punched Dustin in the shoulder who flinched back away from the bully.

"I think I'd rather take Bright Eyes for myself, so we'll keep her out of the freak show." Troy's words dripped with flirtation and narcissism as he twirled a strand of black hair that had dropped in front of her eyes, until she pushed his hand away from her face with a glare.

Mike and Dustin took a step forward to keep her behind their shoulders in defense.

Troy took a step back as James sighed and held a hand up in thought. "I'd go with toothless." James announced, mocking Dustin's lisp.

"I told you a million times, my teeth are coming in." Dustin corrected the bullies defiantly. "It's called Cleidocranial Dysplasia."

"I told you a million times." James just mocked Dustin and his lisp once again, snickering with Troy.

"Do the arm thing." Troy demanded, pointing to Dustin's arms for emphasis as the boy in question shook his head in frustration.

"Do it, freak!" James demanded more aggressively this time, leaning closer to the four.

Dustin sighed before taking off his bag and jacket, letting them drop to the ground before reaching his arms out and cracking them as demanded. Troy and James both recoiled in disgust, groaning at the

action.

"God! It gets me every time!" Troy commented before the two of them shoved Mike and Lucas by the shoulder and walked past them. Before they got too far though, Troy reached over and flicked another strand of Erin's hair with a malicious grin before they left.

Erin shuddered in disgust at being touched by him. "Assholes." Lucas growled once they were far enough away.

"I think it's kinda cool." Mike just let the bullying roll of his shoulders as he complimented Dustin to try to keep him from feeling down about himself. "It's like you have superpowers or something. Like Mr. Fantastic."

"Yeah, except I can't fight evil with it." Dustin reminded, self deprecating even though he knew Mike was being genuine. The four of them started to walk again, Dustin moving to the back of the group to make sure Erin was between himself and Mike.

Safe from that scum bag who harassed her.

From then, school went relatively normal for the most part. Minus the fact that Will still hadn't shown up. Come lunch time, the four even tried looking around for him. But they couldn't find him, so they assumed he probably just went back home.

By recess, they had let it slip from their mind as the kids gathered outside and Mike and Lucas discussed the continuation of last night's campaign.

"We could definitely finish it this weekend." Mike assured Lucas, nodding his head as the two of them mapped out a road map in the dirt beneath them of how to continue from the Demogorgon encounter.

"We'll be ignoring Will's seven though. Fresh roll." Lucas reminded, not willing to give up on that ten hour campaign so easily just because Will had a bad roll.

"Yeah, sure." Mike agreed, neither of them noticing, or maybe not caring, that the other two members of the party currently at school

didn't seem to care discussing the campaign.

Dustin was reading a book on a bench near them, happily in his own world where no one bullied him because of his Dysplasia. Enjoying a world that he liked much more than this one right then.

Beside him, Erin was scribbling away in a note pad given to her by Will, gnawing on her lower lip as she focused on her work.

"Oh look, it's the freaks again." Mike and Lucas sighed as Dustin pulled his nose out of his book.

Troy and James were back again, standing in front of the group with their arms crossed over their chest. "They're playing in the dirt, they really are freaks." James mocked before Troy began kicking the scribbling that Mike and Lucas had been doing in the dirt.

"Come on, man." Lucas groaned out loud, waving his hands out at how they ruined everything before they had a chance to get it written down.

"You have something to say, Midnight?" Troy asked and James immediately got in Lucas' face, who paled and looked down in submission. "That's what I thought." Troy laughed at him, before turning his attention on the other three.

Dustin shrunk in on himself while Mike just stared back at him silently, knowing there was no real way of avoiding them or point in fighting back because it would make it worse.

Troy walked past Mike with a shove to his shoulder before leaning down and snatching the notepad Erin had been scribbling in still, the girl only then noticing they were there. "Hey!"

"What ya drawling, Bright Eyes?" Troy asked, smirking her way before turning the pad to himself and looking down at the crudely done drawing of what appeared to be Will in mage robes. "What is this? Is this supposed to be the queer?" Troy questioned, nose turned up at the drawing.

"Give it back." Lucas demanded, not caring if they messed with him or Mike but the moment they mess with a girl, but not just any girl

their best friend, all bets were off.

Troy laughed openly at the demand, turning to Lucas as he held the notepad up tauntingly. "What was that, Midnight? I was too busy laughing at how this drawing looks almost as bad as the queer himself." Troy mocked, the boys all looking to the girl who drew it as she glared more sharply at him for the insult.

"Come on, man, just give it back." Dustin got into the middle of it this time, standing up to take it back himself even if it meant he would deal with the fallout.

"What was that, Toothless?" James stepped up and got in Dustin's face, squaring his shoulders as he glared down at the freak.

"Oh my god, what the hell is that?" Erin spoke finally, pointing off into the distance.

Troy and James immediately looked off in the direction Erin pointed at, and the moment they did the little girl jumped up and snatched her notepad back from the bully.

Troy whirled around in time to watch her leap over the bench she had been sitting on and race off towards the school. "Get back here, Bright Eyes! You're lucky you're hot otherwise I'd be a lot more rough!" Troy shouted after the girl before he and James started running after her.

"Shit." The other three boys started running after them to help Erin in the event that she's caught.

This was a rare occurrence, when Erin would just run away from the bullies instead of fall behind one of them. But it was a new technique, tricking them before running off. They never quite could catch her though. Being small, nimble and fast had it's perks for her.

The bell rang before they could even get close, everyone filing back into the building and giving not only the girl running away but her best friends the much needed escape they needed.

"You're insane." Lucas commented later on as they sat down in Science with Mr. Clarke.

"Hey, she's fast just like an Elf." Dustin mused as he pulled out his textbook and dropped it on his desk.

"Will will appreciate that you tried, by the way." Mike reminded Erin, knowing she was drawing him because she wanted to help if he was home sick or something. "We can't all draw like Will, but yours is actually really good." Mike assured her with a warm smile.

Erin smiled back at him, grateful to have Mike to perk her up when she's feeling down. All of them help her actually, they're always there for each other. Just this time Will isn't here, who was the one teaching her how to draw better.

"Should draw one of us next time." Erin narrowed her eyes at Dustin, who was half turned to look back at her with a teasing smile.

"Alright, kids, let's get started." The conversation was cut short by Mr. Clarke finally beginning class.

Before long, that too was over.

"Remember, finish chapter twelve and answer twelve point three on the differences between an experiment and other forms of science investigation! This will be on the test, which will cover chapters ten through twelve. It will be multiple choice, with an essay section." Mr. Clarke advised the class, trailing off at the end as no one seemed to be listening.

Turning back to the front of his desk, the party stood with excited smiles plastered on their faces.

"So, did it come?" Mike asked, almost bouncing with excitement.

"Sorry, boys and girl." All four of their smiles faltered at Mr. Clarke's somber words. "I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but... it came." Mr. Clarke revealed with a smile at the end, all of them perking up excitedly before they rushed for the door to head to the AV room.

After a quick jog through the halls, Mike was the first to rush into the AV room to be greeted by the thing they've waited so long to see in their school. "Yes!" Mike said excitedly as he immediately took a seat at the table.



"The Heathkit ham shack." Mr. Clarke introduced the electronic to the excited children.

"Whoa." Mike said as he pulled on the headphones and began trying to use their new favorite thing about the school.

"Ain't she a beaut?" Mr. Clarke asked, excited himself because of how happy this would make the kids.

"I bet you can talk to New York on this thing." Dustin said as he started helping Mike to set it up.

"Think bigger." Mr. Clarke offered, using his hands to emphasize his point.

"California?" Lucas asked, almost not believing it.

"Bigger." Mr. Clarke's smile even grew bigger.

"Australia?" Mike asked, mouth agape in awe at the sheer power of the Heathkit ham shack. When Mr. Clarke nodded, all four of them oohed in amazement.

"Oh, man! When Will sees this, he's totally gonna blow his shit!" Lucas said excitedly, grinning ear to ear to match the other three.

"Lucas!" Mr. Clarke immediately was on him for cussing.

"Sorry..." Lucas apologized, but didn't seem to remorseful as he was still too busy being in awe of their new Heathkit.

Dustin and Erin both chuckled at his blunder, but went back to focusing on the electronic.

After some brief tuning performed by Mike and Dustin, Mike leaned towards the microphone. "Hello, this is Mike Wheeler, president of Hawkins Middle AV Club." Mike announced in an Australian accent.

Dustin grabbed the headset off his head and leaned towards the mic then. "What are you doing?" Lucas asked as Mike laughed at Dustin's excitement, Lucas giggling a little himself while Erin leaned onto Mike's shoulders to get closer herself.

"Hello, this is Dustin and this is the treasurer of the Hawkins Middle AV Club." Dustin introduced himself with an Australian accent of his own. "Do you eat kangaroos for breakfast?" All three of his friends burst into laughter at his question.

Next, Lucas pulled the headphones off of Dustin's head as he went to take his own turn, Erin trying to jump in herself before they were interrupted by a knock at the door.

"Sorry to interrupt, but, uh, may I borrow Michael, Lucas, Dustin and Erin?" The Principal was the one at the door, all four kids looking to him in surprise as to what the principal wanted with them.

Until they noticed the chief of police behind him, and they all turned to one another in worry over what was going on.

They were sat next to each other in the Principals office, each talking over one another as they tried to explain to Chief Hopper about the route Will would take home at night. They knew he didn't come to school, but they would have never guessed Will would go missing.

"Okay, okay, okay. One at a time, all right? You." Chief Hopper pointed to Mike to speak first as the other three went quiet. "You said he takes what?"

"Mirkwood." Mike answered simply.

"Mirkwood?" Hopper questioned, not sure what street they were referring to.

"Yeah." Mike assured him more quietly at seeing Hopper's doubt.

"Have you ever heard of Mirkwood?" Hopper asked the other officer sat beside him.

"I have not. That sounds made up to me." The second officer answered as he scribbled down everything on a note pad.

"No, it's from Lord of the Rings." Lucas corrected the adult, staring back at Hopper instead of the second officer.

"The Hobbit." Dustin and Erin both corrected him at the same time,

Mike glaring weakly at the two.

"It doesn't matter." Lucas said while turning to them with a face of annoyance and his hands outstretched in disbelief that they thought this would matter.

"He asked!" Dustin argued, getting just as annoyed as Lucas as Mike turned his eyes to the floor in annoyance over the two.

"He asked!" Lucas mocked Dustin's words, punctuating his words with a wave of a hand.

"Shut up, guys!" Mike finally snapped at the two bickering boys on opposite ends of the couch.

"Hey, hey, hey! What did I just say?" Hopper questioned the kids who didn't seem to understand how to listen to him and what he tells them not to do. "One at a damn time. Now, you." He nodded towards Mike again.

"Mirkwood, it's a real road. It's just the name that's made up. It's where Cornwallis and Kerley meet." Mike explained calmly, happy that Lucas and Dustin were quiet finally.

"Yeah, all right, I think I know that-"

"We can show you, if you want." Mike interrupted the Chief, sitting forward more on the couch.

"I said that I know it!" Chief Hopper corrected the kid that spoke over him.

"We can help look." Mike said more firmly this time, not wanting to take no for an answer. This was their best friend, they wanted to help find him.

"No." Hopper shot him down without missing a beat. The four then began trying harder to get him to agree, but it was met again and again with a no. "After school, you are all to go home. Immediately. That means no biking around looking for your friend, no investigating, no nonsense. This isn't some Lord of the Rings book. This is real life." Hopper said firmly, visibly annoyed by the children

in front of him.

"The Hobbit." Dustin corrected him almost as soon as he stopped talking.

"Shut up!" Lucas leaned over and smacked Dustin's leg, inadvertently shoving into Mike who then shoved into Erin. Dustin then leaned over and smacked Lucas back.

"Stop it!" Mike barked at the two, shoving each of their arms away but instead they shoved him and then continued hitting one another. Erin leaned over Mike to smack at Lucas for shoving her, who swatted her hand away and then Mike smacked at Lucas himself for swatting at a girl.

"Do I make myself clear?" Hopper questioned the kids, speaking scarily softly for the person that he was usually. When the four just stared back at him in silence, he stood up and leaned down to their eye level. "Do I make myself... clear?" Hopper asked again, more threatening this time as the four leaned back into the couch to try to get away.

Reluctantly, each of them nodded in agreement to Hoppers demand. "Yes, sir."

---

Dustin poked at his food on his plate, chin resting on his open palm as he stared down at his dinner. He didn't really have an appetite tonight. "Dusty, are you alright?" Mrs. Henderson asked from the kitchen sink where she was washing her own dish.

"I'm not hungry." Dustin said, pushing his plate away from him before standing from the table.

"Not hungry? But you're always excited for our pasta night." Mrs. Henderson reminded as Dustin walked over and dropped the plate onto the counter beside her.

"I'm going to my room." Dustin said without a word to her worry, walking away.

Mrs. Henderson watched him go quietly, worried for her son but

understanding that he was only worried for his friend. She took the plate to go put it away until he's ready for it.

Dustin barely laid down on his bed when his Super Comm that was on his desk started to crackle with static, standing up to go grab it. "... there Dwarf? Over."

Dustin picked it up and held it to his mouth. "I'm here, Elf." Dustin answered, sitting down at his desk instead of back on his bed.

"You have to say Over when you're done. Over." Dustin rolled his eyes, not in the mood for the usual back and forth between them. He was too worried about their other friend tonight.

"What is it, Elf? Over." Dustin hissed the last word quietly, knowing he needed to stay positive but he didn't want to just sit around like this.

"Steve just left to go see Nancy, so I'm sneaking out to go look for Will. Over." Dustin immediately shot up out of his chair at the words that crackled through his super comm.

"What do you mean you're going to go look for Will? You can't go out alone at night, Erin. Over." Dustin almost forgot to end it the proper way, because he was busy being the defender of their Elf since the other three couldn't do it.

"But I won't be alone. Because you and I both know if I thought of it Mike's already doing it. Over." Dustin opened his mouth to counter, but he couldn't disagree because that was actually true. Mike always was the first to come up with most of their ideas.

"Meet me at your garage. We'll go join him and Lucas. Over and Out." Dustin said before pushing the antenna on his Super Comm down.

After grabbing her from her house, they took off on their bikes and easily found Mike and Lucas already out and ready to go. Before long, they were coasting down Mirkwood towards where there was barricades set up to stop people from going into the woods. "This is it." Lucas said with finality as they came to a stop next to the woods.

The sky above them rumbled loudly with thunder, the forewarning to

a storm brewing. "Hey, guys. You feel that?" Dustin asked, reaching a hand up towards the sky that sounded ready to open up above. "I think maybe we should go back." Dustin tried to reason with them, but they were already off their bikes.

"No. We're not going back. Just stay close." Mike said instead, serious and firm about the decision. "Come on." Mike urged as he lifted the police tape and started to walk into the trees, Erin and Lucas right behind him. "Just stay on channel six, and don't do anything stupid."

The sky rumbled with another crack of thunder above. "Hey, guys, wait up!" Dustin raced after them, not wanting to be left all alone out here. Especially not when the sky right then did open and the rain began to fall. "Wait up!"

Soon it turned into a torrential downpour, the kids continuing on as they called out for Will. "Will!"

"Will!"

"Byers!"

"I've got your X-Men 134!"

"Guys, I really think we should turn back." Dustin said as they came into a clearing, having been searching for a while now in this storm.

"Seriously, Dustin?" Erin asked, glaring his way through the rain.

"You wanna be a baby, then go home already!" Lucas snapped at the scared member of their troupe.

"I'm just being realistic, Lucas!" Dustin snapped back at him.

"No, you're just being a big sissy!" Lucas barked in response to his supposed realistic view.

"Did you ever think Will went missing because he ran into something bad? And we're going to the exact same spot where he was last seen? And we have no weapons or anything?" Dustin asked, waving his hands out around him for emphasis.

"Dustin, shut up." Mike tried to quiet him as he looked out into the darkness before them.

"I'm just saying, does that seem smart to you?" Dustin asked instead of listening.

"Shut up." Erin shushed him this time, as they began to hear rustling around them.

"Did you guys hear that?" Mike asked as they stopped their walk to listen to the sound.

They pivoted to look behind them at the rustling sound, shining their flashlights only to see nothing. But then the sound moved, and they all turned with a gasp as their lights caught something mere feet from them.

A girl, a girl with a shaved head and no coat or jacket or even shoes.

The four just stared at her in surprise, no one able to say a word.

They came out here looking for Will. But this wasn't Will.

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*I wrote this one out a lot faster than I thought I would. I honestly didn't expect to have time to finish this one so quick. I really enjoyed the humorous bits though, like breakfast at the Wheelers for instance. Please tell me that no one actually puts straight syrup on their eggs, though. Just...no.*

*Still getting back into the swing of things, but I hope this chapter was better than the last one. It was a bit less scripted at least, since I had to fill in the gaps of time that weren't shown on the show.*

*Question time, do you guys like the current point of view, or do you want it first person and just switch between characters? I kind of like this one I'm working with, but I'm also a bigger fan of first person since it's a lot more in depth and descriptive. At least in the stuff I read, anyways. Please, let me know your preferences!*

*Thank you so much for reading, and for giving this a chance! I'll see you all next time!*

### 3. The Strange Girl

The girl with the shaved head sat on the couch in Mike's basement, Mike's coat draped around her shoulder but still soaked to the bone and breathing heavily as she looked around in a daze.

The four party members stood in front of her, silently watching her as they each tried to figure out what the hell is going on and what to do. "Is there a number we can call for your parents?" Mike was the first to speak, the girl looking up at him as he spoke.

"Where's your hair? Do you have cancer?" Dustin asked with a distinct lack of filter or possible sensitivity.

"Did you run away?" Lucas asked, himself and the other two choosing to ignore Dustin's comment.

"Are you in some kind of trouble?" Mike asked, the girl just looking between each of them dazedly. She hadn't spoken a word at all since they've found her.

"Is that blood?" Erin asked, Lucas reaching out towards her soaked shirt that held a marking of red on it.

"Stop it! You're freaking her out!" Mike chastised Lucas after smacking his hand away from the strange girl.

"She's freaking me out!" Lucas countered as he waved a hand towards the girl.

"I bet she's deaf." Dustin came back with another out there comment.

"She's not deaf." Erin argued, meeting Dustin's gaze before he proceeded to loudly clap his hands together. Everyone, the girl included, flinched at the sudden loud noise.

"Not deaf." Dustin surmised with a shrug of his shoulders, ignoring the sigh of annoyance that came from the short girl beside him.

"Alright, that's enough, alright? She's just scared and cold." Mike said, glancing towards the girl who looked back at him with an



unwavering gaze that made him feel weird. When the thunder of the storm outside clapped again, he turned around to go over to the laundry and see if he could find her some dry clothes.

Erin watched as the girl flinched from another clap of thunder before turning around and following after Mike, shoving what he had chosen so far out of his hands. "She can't wear boxer briefs or shorts, Mike. She's soaking wet and it's only getting colder. She needs something warm." Erin lectured him as she dumped the laundry basket to find something easier.

Fortunately, the two of them found a pair of sweatpants and a heavier shirt for her. Mike walked back over to her with clothes in hand. "Here, these are clean. Okay?" Mike offered, the unknown girl gently taking them from him.

She then sniffed them before rubbing the soft fabric of the clothing against her face. The four friends just watched her for a moment, before she took off Mike's jacket. When she stood up and reached for her shirt, the boys all yelled out in surprise.

"No, no, no!" Mike yelled as he quickly stopped the girl from taking her shirt off in front of them, Erin grabbing the clean shirt and holding it out in front of her to prevent the other two currently freaking out boys from seeing anything if she continued.

"Oh, my god. Oh, my god. Oh, my god."

"Oh stop, it's not like you two haven't seen worse." Erin said with a shake of her head at Dustin and Lucas' freak out.

"See over there? T-that's the bathroom. Privacy, get it?" Mike asked as he pointed over towards the bathroom in the corner of the basement, face flush with embarrassment over almost having seen some strange girl change in front of himself and his friends.

Erin rolled her eyes at the boys before gesturing towards the bathroom for the girl. "Boys are overly dramatic, come on I'll show you to the bathroom." Erin offered, giving the frightened girl a smile to help ease her before she started towards the bathroom herself.

Once inside, the two were once more joined by Mike who went to close the door behind the stranger. Her hand caught it before it could shut. "You don't want it closed?" Mike asked, confused since when Erin would be over she'd close and lock the door behind her.

"No." The girl finally spoke, Mike and Erin both looking back at her in surprise for a moment.

"Oh, so you can speak." Mike realized, smiling a little for a moment. "Okay, well... Um, how about we just keep the door... just like this?" Mike asked as he closed the door until it was opened but just a crack. "Better?" Mike asked, keeping his hand on the door in case it wasn't enough.

"Yes." The girl answered, her words flat and her eyes never leaving Mike.

Erin pursed her lips, a little put off by how intense the girls gaze was on Mike before he gave her a thumbs up and turned to walk away and let her change. When the girls eyes shifted to her, Erin started to shrink in on herself a little at the intensity. "When you're done come on back out." Erin offered with a smile she hoped didn't seem to forced before walking away too.

"This is mental." Dustin's comment words drew her back out of her shell once she was back beside them.

"At least she can talk." Mike reminded, since she finally spoke even though they found her like an hour or two ago and she hadn't said a word the entire way here.

"She said "no" and "yes." Your three year old sister says more." Lucas reminded in turn, since obviously this was not normal.

"She tried to get naked." All three turned their gazes towards Dustin for the unhelpful reminder of what almost happened.

"There's something seriously wrong with her. Like, wrong in the head." Lucas continued on, pointing at his own head for emphasis.

"Hey, that's uncalled for." Erin pointed out, the snide comments not welcome when they didn't even know her.

"She just went like..." Dustin acted like he was lifting his own shirt, pulling his arms up and accidentally knocking his hat off in the process.

Mike and Erin leveled him with a glare for still being on this subject while Lucas chose to ignore.

"I bet she escaped from Pennhurst." Lucas theorized while emphasizing his words with his hands.

"From where?" Mike asked, obviously not amused by Lucas assuming things about a girl they don't even know.

"The nuthouse in Kerley County." Lucas revealed, turning to Dustin when he noticed his mischievous smile.

"You got a lot of family there?" Dustin asked teasingly, Mike rolling his eyes at the lack of seriousness between the two.

"Bite me." Lucas retorted, glaring his friend down who just kept smiling. "Seriously though, think about it. That would explain her shaved hair and why she's so crazy." Lucas said while tapping a finger against his temple to try to get Mike to understand easier.

"Why she went like..." Dustin reenacted the same scene again, lifting his arms up quick into the air.

"She's an escapee is the point. She's probably a psycho." Lucas continued instead of giving up trying to convince the others.

"Like Michael Myers." Dustin realized, mouth agape at the idea that someone that dangerous could be in this very basement with them.

"Exactly!"

"Okay, stop it you two." Erin interrupted the two conspiring boys with a wave of her hands between them.

"We should've never brought her here." Lucas said as he shoved Erin's hands away, the girl glaring at him for a moment before Mike finally stopped them himself.

"So you just wanted to leave her out in that storm?" Mike questioned with a glare at his best friend for being so cold towards the poor girl.

"Yes! We went out to find Will, not another problem." Lucas reminded Mike of what their actual objective was. To find Will, to find their friend. Not some weird strange girl with a shaved head who barely speaks.

"I think we should tell your mom."

"I second that."

"Oh because that's not a horrible idea."

"Who's crazy now?" Mike asked the two who wanted to go up to his Mom.

"How is that crazy?" Lucas asked, beginning to raise his voice from frustration that Mike wouldn't listen to reason.

"Cause, we weren't supposed to be out tonight, remember?" Mike reminded him of the fact that, technically, they all broke the rules and went out without their parents knowledge.

"So if he tells his mom, she'll tell your mom, and your mom, and my mom." Erin continued what Mike was getting at while pointing to each boy for emphasis, both of them paling as they realized what that meant.

"Oh, man."

"Our houses become Alcatraz."

"Exactly. We'll never find Will." Mike finished, glad that the conspiracy theory moment was done and they finally realized just how much trouble they could all get in.

Lucas stood silently with his arms folded, looking up at Dustin when he yet again acted like he was taking his shirt off to remind them all of what the girl did.

His hat smacked him in the side of the face a second later.

"Alright, here's the plan. She sleeps here tonight." Mike revealed, both Lucas and Dustin's jaws dropping for a moment.

"You're letting a girl-"

"Just listen!" Mike stopped Dustin before he could start this time.

"Did you just forget that I'm a girl or ignore it?" Erin interrupted Mike this time, glaring at Dustin at insinuating she wasn't a girl since she had slept over Mike's house many times before.

"Listen!" Mike said it louder this time. "In the morning, she sneaks around my house, goes to the front door and rings my doorbell. My mom will answer and know exactly what to do. She'll send her back to Pennhurst or wherever she comes from. We'll be totally in the clear. Then tomorrow night, we go back out. And this time, we find Will." Mike explained to the three, unwilling to try any other plan or argue about it anymore. This was the plan, this is what is going to happen. Then, they're going to go get Will back.

Lucas, Dustin and Erin all exchanged a glance but said nothing more. Once Mike makes up his mind, there's no changing it.

A few minutes later, Mike had set up a pillow fort in the basement for the girl to sleep in and his other three friends were getting ready to leave as they watched him bring the girl his sleeping bag.

"You really think she's a psycho?" Dustin asked Lucas as the three of them stood on the stairs.

"Wouldn't want her in my house." Lucas replied with a shake of his head before heading up the stairs to go home.

Dustin looked back down at Mike and the girl and sighed. "Mental." Dustin said simply before he too pounded his way up the stairs to get home.

Erin stood there for a moment, watching the encounter between Mike and the stranger and how he was so open and friendly. For a moment it brought back a memory of when they first met, before she sighed and started up the stairs herself. With her luck, she'll probably get caught if she doesn't hurry.

Lucas and Dustin were already on their bikes before she even got outside, pulling her hood up over her head to avoid the rain and hopping onto her own to catch up to them.

The ride was silent aside from the crack of thunder in the sky above them. In no time, Lucas was home and then she and Dustin were in front of their own homes. "Umm...hey wait a sec." Erin was stopped from going up her drive by Dustin's voice raising above the thunder.

"If I don't hurry babysitter Steve might catch me, Dwarf." Erin reminded, nodding towards her dimly lit house across from his own.

"Don't go trying to sneak out again, alright?" Dustin asked, eyes on the road beneath them instead of looking up at her. "Or at least radio me or something like you did tonight. We don't...you know it's hard enough knowing Will's missing but if you went missing too..." Dustin trailed off and Erin stared back at him for a moment.

Thunder rumbled above them again as they sat in silence for a moment. Yes, the boys were very protective of her because of the fact that she was a girl. Albeit a tomboy, still a girl. But it was unusual for Dustin to be so outright about it. Usually he showed it through teasing or taunting.

"I know, I promise I'll radio you if I consider it again." Erin said shyly, not liking the idea that she worried him. All she wants is to get Will back, for their party to be whole again. Hell, even to just know he's safe would be enough right now.

"I miss him too, you know." Dustin reminded, their eyes finally meeting as he gave her a soft smile.

Erin was glad for once that it was raining as her lip trembled, not wanting to admit aloud just how scared she was that something bad had really happened to Will.

"We're going to get him back." Erin said, happy her voice was firm and unwavering so he didn't know just how scared she was. Only Mike and Will have seen her that way, and she'd really prefer it stay that way too.

"Of course. You'll get your Gandalf back, Galadriel." Dustin teased her this time, sticking his tongue out at her when she turned to him once more and giving a wink as well.

"Oh go back down into your mines, Dwar-"

"What the hell are you doing outside?!"

"Shit!"

Dustin and Erin both turned around to see a pissed off Steve Harrington in the street behind them, Dustin taking off into his driveway without a word and Erin doing the same.

Well, looks like she was right about probably getting caught.

---

Erin hastily threw her things into her bag, trying to beat Steve out of the house to avoid more lecturing. She thought it was pretty hypocritical though, considering he was at the same exact place she was. Though, from what Mike said, he crawled up the side of their house into Nancy's window.

Hmm, wonder how Mrs. Wheeler would feel about hearing that. Maybe this will get him off her back till her parents come home.

Her Super comm crackled to life from her desk, looking over in curiosity since it was early. None of the boys call this early, they all just meet up on the bike ride to school.

Picking it up, she held it to her mouth as she waited for whoever it was to say something. When all she got was clicks and more static, she looked down at it in confusion. "Hello? Guys, did you forget to turn off your comm? Over." Erin asked in general, thinking it might be Dustin because he was just across the street.

It has to be a really clear day to reach Mike who's furthest away.

"Hello?" Erin jerked away from the super comm at the foreign voice, almost putting it down. It took her a moment to remember who's voice that was, since she only spoke like two words last night.

"Hi..." Erin greeted the stranger back, not sure if she should ask why she had Mike's super comm or not. Knowing how friendly Mike is, he probably wanted her to have something to keep busy with. "You managed to get a good signal to me, must be a clear day." Erin continued, chuckling a little in hopes to break the awkward tension.

"Good signal?"

"Yeah, usually Mike and I can only talk over these if it's a really clear day." Erin answered, hearing additional noise in the background of the static that was no doubt the stranger not taking her hand off the buttons.

"Hey, you found my super comm. Pretty cool, huh? I talk to my friends with it." Erin snorted at how Mike was actually in a pretty good mood for it being so early.

"Good signal." The stranger replied as Erin put her comm down to pull her jacket on.

"Huh? Good signal, sometimes. It's actually pretty weak, usually. I mostly talk to Lucas with it because he's so close by."

"Gee, Mike, I see who's your favorite." Erin butted in with a smirk at the super comm, giggling a little when she heard him gasp at hearing her.

"Erin?" Mike asked aloud, his voice laced with confusion.

"See you at school, Mike!" Erin said before putting her super comm back down on the desk so she could head to school.

"Guys? Why are you all talking on these when we have school to get to." Erin couldn't resist, she picked the super comm back up just to blow raspberries in it at Lucas being the big brother yet again.

With that she put it back and raced out the door.

"Straight home, you hear me." Steve met her out in the garage, much to her chagrin.

"Is that what you were told when you decided to crawl in Nancy's



window last night?" Erin asked with a cheeky smirk at the older teenager, who's serious demeanor faltered at her words. "You two have fun last night studying anatomy?" Erin asked, cackling before taking off out the garage on her bike.

"You must be imagining things, probably a fever from being out in the storm last night with the boy next door!" Steve called after her, his voice echoing into the neighborhood as said boy mentioned just so happened to come down his own driveway on his bike.

"Next time wait until no one's around to see you before you climb into a girls window, babysitter Steve!" Erin called back as she peddled away quicker and quicker to escape his wrath should he choose to use it on her.

---

After arriving at school and sitting down Lucas, Dustin and Erin realized that they were another friend short today. "He's never this late." Dustin said while looking at Mike's empty desk.

"I'm telling you, his stupid plan failed." Lucas said with a scowl, wishing they hadn't brought that girl home last night.

"I thought you liked his plan." Dustin said, since Lucas hadn't made any comments about not wanting to try it last night when Mike suggested it.

"Yeah, but obviously it was stupid, or he'd be here." Lucas said with scowl still present as he waved a hand towards Mike's empty seat.

"If his mom found out a girl spent the night-"

"He's in deep shit right about now." Lucas cut Dustin off, sighing at the fact that if Mike gets caught then they were all going down. Mike would never rat any of them out, but all of their parents just assume if one gets in trouble then the rest helped at this point. Then they wouldn't be able to keep looking for Will.

Erin was about to cut in to remind once again that she was still very much a girl, but Dustin beat her to it. "Hey, what if she slept naked?" Dustin asked, leaning towards Lucas with his eyes a little brighter.

Lucas and Erin both just stared at him in amazement for a moment, over the fact that he still hasn't let this go, before Lucas spoke. "Oh, my god. She didn't." Lucas assured Dustin with a tired sigh at the end of his words, closing his eyes as he wished this would leave his mind.

"Oh, if Mrs. Wheeler tells my parents..." Dustin trailed off as he worriedly pressed his hands to his face.

"Mike would never rat us out." Erin reminded Dustin of what they all knew, leaning forward on her desk that sat behind Lucas'.

"I don't know." Dustin replied after pulling his hands from his face, still visibly worried.

"All that matters is, after school, the freak will be back in the loony bin, and we can focus on what really matters, finding Will." Lucas reminded, punctuating the last two words with a pat of his hand on his desk before turning to his text book.

Dustin and Erin watched him for a moment before turning their gazes back to their own desks.

"Can I just remind for a moment that I'm still very much a girl just like this stranger?" Erin spoke up not less than a minute later, Lucas snorting to try to keep from laughing as Dustin looked over at her.

"It's different with you, though. After all, you and Mike used to-"

"Don't you dare say it!"

Erin glared sharply at the back of Lucas' head as he just held a devious smile without looking back her way.

Dustin looked between the two, completely confused and feeling a little left out at not knowing what the hell Lucas was about to reveal.

"What, you don't want our class knowing that when you two were younger you-"

"Shut it, mouth breather!" Erin snapped at him, interrupting him once again before leaning forward and flicking him on the back of the head.

"Was this before I moved here?" Dustin asked, watching Lucas turn to glare at Erin for the flick on his head.

"Yes, and you will not be hearing about it." Erin said with finality, folding her arms defiantly over her desk as she glared right back at Lucas.

They went silent then, the conversation seemingly dropped. More than likely to be brought back up at some later point.

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Once school was over the three hopped on their bikes and headed straight for the Wheeler home to check on how the situation was going. They barely spoke during the ride, just focusing on pedaling and their own internal thoughts about what could be going on with Mike about this stranger.

Lucas and Dustin were surprised when they walked into Mike's room to see the girl sitting on his bed, Erin not so much because this was Mike. "Are you out of your mind?" Lucas asked, genuinely amazed by what Mike is doing now.

"Just listen to me." Mike said as he stood in front of his three friends.

"You are out of your mind!" Lucas reasoned, waving his hands towards the strange girl sitting on his best friends bed, who kept staring back at them with an intense look that made him shudder.

"She knows about Will." Mike revealed, that getting their attention as all three pairs of eyes landed on him.

"What do you mean she knows about Will?" Dustin asked, confused as to how some random stranger would know about their best friend.

Mike sighed and walked over to his dresser lined with trophies and pictures, picking up one in particular that held all of them gathered around their newest trophy smiling at the camera. "She pointed at him, at his picture. She knew he was missing. I could tell." Mike admitted, pointing to Will on the picture.

"You could tell?" Lucas asked, not sure how he was supposed to believe this.

"Just think about it. You really think it was a coincidence that we found her on Mirkwood, the same place where Will disappeared?" Mike asked, Lucas and Dustin glancing towards the girl sitting cross legged on Mike's bed.

"That is weird." Dustin agreed as he turned to Lucas.

"And she said bad people are after her. I think maybe these bad people are the same ones that took Will. I think she knows what happened to him." Mike admitted, hoping to everything that he was right and she really does know what's going on and can help them find Will.

"Then why doesn't she tell us?" Lucas asked, looking to the stranger in frustration now before walking over towards her, the other three following. "Do you know where he is?" Lucas asked, and when all he got was silence and more staring he leaned forward and grabbed her by the shoulders. "Do you know where Will is?!" Lucas demanded more loudly this time as he shook her by the shoulders, the girl looking back at him in fear.

"Stop it!"

"You're scaring her!"

"She should be scared!" Lucas snapped back at the two that interrupted him. "If you know where he is, tell us!" Lucas was once more met by silence by the girl. "This is nuts. We have to take her to your mom!" Lucas said as he turned his attention back to Mike, fed up with the silent treatment.

"No! Eleven said telling any adult would put us in danger." Mike revealed, Lucas turning his gaze back to the girl, Eleven as Mike called her, while Erin stepped around Lucas towards the girl.

"What kind of danger?" Dustin asked, face paler in fear of what that could possibly mean.

"Her name is Eleven?" Lucas asked, not believing that for a second since that wasn't a name. It was a number. No one is named after a number.

"El for short." Mike replied to Lucas instead of answering Dustin's more important question.

"Mike, what kind of danger?"

Erin stepped closer to Eleven as she watched her, Eleven's own gaze drifting away from Mike and to her instead. The boys continued talking, but she tuned them out as she just observed the quiet girl. Danger, from someone who acts this strange and as Lucas claims looks like a mental patient. What kind of danger did they find themselves?

Erin watched as Eleven's eyes went back to the boys as Lucas moved for the door. When he opened it, it slammed back shut hard enough that Erin's eyes shifted to it and the trembling figurines on Mike's desk from the sheer force. Then, when he tried again, it slammed once more with just as much force.

All four of them turned back to Eleven. "No." A drop of blood ran down her nose onto her lip as she stared back at the boys with a hard look in her eyes.

What...

The boys gathered together, whispering among themselves as Eleven just watched them again. Leaving Erin to walk over to her.

As she got closer, Eleven stepped back and sat back down on Mike's bed. Was there any point in asking if she had just slammed a door with her mind? Or was that basically just a statement since there was no other logical reasoning for why the door would slam shut twice in a row like that.

"Hi..." Erin said instead, voice a little shaky as she took a seat beside the girl on her best friends bed. "I'm Erin, the one you talked to this morning over Mike's super comm." Erin introduced herself, even though Eleven has already met her. At least now they know each other's names.

"Erin." Eleven repeated her name back to her, Erin smiling a little easier which surprisingly earned one from the girl beside her.

"Yeah, nice to meet you again." Erin held out a hand to Eleven to shake, Eleven just staring at her hand for a moment.

Slowly, Eleven took her hand in her own, and it was as Eleven was looking down at their joined hands that Erin noticed ink on the girls wrist. The numbers 011 neatly written in black ink across her skin.

Oh what have they gotten themselves into this time?

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*I'm genuinely amazed with my ability to crank out chapters so quickly right now. This is coming down to I'm writing a chapter a day. I hope y'all are enjoying it. I also feel like I should apologize for what's going to be the frequent referencing of LOTR or the Hobbit, but I love it too much to ever apologize for that. Besides, they canonically loved the books so it makes sense.*

*We finally meet El though, and get to see some more of the friends interactions with one another.*

*So question time, since there so far this story hasn't been getting too many hits I wanted to ask how y'all feel about the length of the chapters. Typically, like I do with my other work, I write out ten pages in my word doc and that makes one chapter. But considering the length of the episodes and the amount of the script of which I am working with, as you can see each episode isn't getting finished with each chapter.*

*I don't actually go back and reread my work after I've edited it and posted it. By the way, I'm sorry if there's errors or anything that I miss. I skim through pretty quick, trying to stop that. But I'm otherwise unsure if the chapters are too long or too short for all of you. So please, let me know your preference on the subject. In all honesty, I have no problem making them longer if need be.*

*Sorry for the long footnote. Thanks again for reading, and I'll see you all next time!*

## 4. The Weirdo on Maple Street

The dining room was quiet, not one of the eight people surrounding the dining table saying a word. The only sound that came was from the tink of silverware against plates.

The four best friends weren't even truly eating their dinner, they were either poking at it, moving it about on the plate, or taking small bites instead of eating normally like the rest of the people eating.

"Something wrong with the meatloaf?" Mrs. Wheeler asked, watching the four carefully and how they weren't eating.

All four of them looked to the head of the table, but Dustin was the one to speak. "Oh, no, I had two bologna sandwiches for lunch." Dustin answered with a nervous smile, following it with a nervous chuckle. "I don't know why."

Lucas looked to him for the bad cover, but ultimately chuckled nervously himself. "Me, too." Lucas said as he turned back to Mrs. Wheeler.

"It's delicious, Mommy." Nancy spoke up, smiling sweetly at the head of the house as the four kids looked at her with their own thoughts on the kiss up.

"Thank you, sweetie." Mrs. Wheeler replied as Mike and Erin shared a look before each reaching for their glasses of milk.

"So, there's this... special assembly thing tonight... for Will at the school field. Barb's driving." Nancy revealed, Lucas and Dustin each smirking before hiding it at how obvious she was.

"Why am I just hearing about this?" Mrs. Wheeler asked, eyes on her plate as she cut her food.

Nancy kept up the innocent facade. "I thought you knew." Nancy said while still picking at her own food.

"I told you, I don't want you out after dark until Will is found." Mrs. Wheeler reminded her daughter firmly, Nancy's facade cracking a

little as her words overlapped her moms.

"I know, I know, but it'd be super weird if I'm not there. I mean, everyone's going." Nancy admitted, putting on her best doe eyes for her mom as the four friends continued picking at their food.

Mrs. Wheeler sighed, looking back down the table towards the younger kids. "Just... be back by ten." Mrs. Wheeler reasoned, before an idea struck her. "Why don't you take the kids?" Mrs. Wheeler offered to her daughter, since that was their best friend after all.

"No!"

"Mmm Mmm."

"No thanks."

Mrs. Wheeler looked back down the table in suspicion of the reaction the kids gave over going to a rally for their friend. "Don't you think you should be there? For Will?" Mrs. Wheeler asked, a little flabbergasted by their reaction.

Mike and Erin had been in the middle of taking a sip of their respective drinks when they noticed a certain shaven headed girl walking down the stairs behind Mrs. Wheeler. Mike spit his milk back into the cup, accidentally splashing it back up into his face. Erin, however, was far more messy as she accidentally inhaled her milk, which made her cough and spit what was left in her mouth out onto her plate.

Mrs. Wheeler narrowed her eyes at the reaction the two gave, turning her head to see what they were looking at. It was at that moment that Dustin pounded loudly on the table, drawing Mrs. Wheelers attention back to them as she gasped and Holly whined loudly at the noise.

"Sorry. Spasm." Dustin apologized, nervously chuckling as he shrunk back into his chair. Looking to his left Lucas was trying to help Erin who was still coughing quietly into a napkin. The four of them all exchanged a quick look once Eleven was out of sight.

Mrs. Wheeler just looked at them for a moment before sighing, Holly whimpering as she shrunk down in her chair while looking fearfully



down the table towards Dustin. "It's okay, Holly. It's just a loud noise." Mrs. Wheeler comforted her youngest child.

"Nice." Nancy remarked sarcastically towards the boy that frightened the little girl.

Dustin just shrunk more into his seat with a frown.

After dinner was over, the four managed to put together a tray of food for El without Mike's parents seeing them. Mike carried it down the steps to her. "El?" Mike called to her, reaching the bottom of the steps and seeing her sitting in the pillow fort with his super comm. "No adults. Just us and some meatloaf." Mike assured her as he put the food down in front of her.

Eleven just looked up at the three behind him, more at Lucas and Dustin with a critical gaze that they would try to tell someone about her.

"Don't worry. They won't tell anyone about you." Mike assured upon seeing the way El looked at his friends behind him. "They promise. Right?" Mike turned to the two who actually needed to prove their promise to not say a word about Eleven.

"We never would've upset you if we knew you had superpowers." Dustin agreed to the promise with that, Mike reaching over and punching him in the thigh a moment later for his words about Eleven. "Ow!"

"What Dustin is trying to say is that they were just scared... earlier. That's all." Mike corrected his friend who had a lack of sensitivity.

"We just wanted to find our friend." Lucas admitted, shifting awkwardly as Eleven continued to stare back at them.

"Friend?" Eleven asked, still not breaking the gaze on them.

"Yeah, friend. Will?" Lucas reminded her of their friend's name that they were searching for.

"What is 'friend'?" Eleven asked, Lucas and Dustin exchanging a look of disbelief.

"Is she serious?" Dustin just shrugged at Lucas in response. "Um, a friend."

"Is someone that you'd do anything for." Mike cut Lucas off unceremoniously, smiling softly at Eleven.

"You lend them your cool stuff, like comic books and trading cards." Dustin piped in, also smiling now.

"And they never break a promise." Mike revealed, wanting Eleven to fully understand how serious a promise was to them.

"Especially when there's spit." Lucas agreed, earning a look of disgust from Dustin and Erin for the comment.

"Spit?" Eleven asked, voice sounding unsure as she noticed the look on the two disgusted kids faces.

"A spit swear means..." Lucas spit in his hand. "You never break your word. It's a bond." Lucas finished, before taking Dustin's hand and claspng his that held his spit into Dustin's.

Erin covered her mouth to restrain a gag and stepped back, while Dustin looked down at his now spit covered hand with a look of horror and disgust.

"That's super important, because friends... they tell each other things. Things that parents don't know." Mike revealed, pursing his lips as he hoped that El understood what they were explaining and would choose to tell them what she knew about Will.

Eleven dawned a thoughtful look for a moment before narrowing her eyes and looking back up at the three behind Mike.

"A friend is also someone that you can trust, no matter what." Erin chimed in finally, having stayed quiet for the majority of the conversation. "They always have your back, and you protect each other from other people who aren't friends. They also joke around and tease each other a lot." Erin said as she knelt down beside Mike, smiling at Eleven as the girl watched her.

"Tease?" Eleven asked, all attention on Erin.

"Yeah, it's like playfully picking on each other. But it's never serious." Erin explained, shoving Mike over out of his crouched position and onto the floor for emphasis. When Eleven's eyes widened in shock, she held her hands up apologetically. "See, teasing. Mike does it-"

Mike shoved Erin back onto the floor mid sentence.

"See, it's funny. It's just teasing, nothing serious." Mike assured Eleven as Erin sat back up.

"When you have friends, you can trust them that they'll never do anything to hurt you. It's all just fun and laughs and..." Erin trailed off with a wistful smile at the memories the five of them have made over the years.

Mike glanced her way to see the look on his best friends face, frowning a little as he knew without even having to ask that Erin was thinking of Will.

"Friends." Eleven said softly, a small smile curling on her lips. She wanted that, she wanted friends.

Looking back up at Mike, who was patting Erin's shoulder, she wanted these two as friends. They seemed...nice. They seemed like good friends. Like they would make good friends.

After a little while, the boys all went to one side of the room to whisper among themselves while Erin sat at the table, which still had their D&D board and figurines set up. Eleven took a seat opposite her, looking down at the little figurines as the boys finally stopped whispering among themselves.

"What's the weirdo doing?" Lucas asked, Erin shooting him a weak glare from where she sat.

Eleven sat at the table, both hands flat against the board with her head down and eyes closed. "El?" Mike called her name, and after a moment of silence she opened her eyes once more.

Eleven then picked up the wizard figurine from the table, holding it in front of her face. "Will." Eleven said simply, all four friends in awe to how she knew that was Will's character.

"Superpowers." Dustin muttered, in awe of the super powered girl at the table.

Mike took a seat at the table as well. "Did you see him? On Mirkwood?" Mike asked as Eleven just continued looking at the board game in front of her. "Do you know where he is?"

Eleven reached her arm over the table and swiped all the figurines off the table, before flipping the board upside down. After a brief moment, she then took Will's figurine and placed it on the now upside down board game with a resounding thud.

"I don't understand." Mike was the first one to speak.

"Hiding." Eleven replied, not taking her eyes off the board.

"Will is hiding?" Mike asked, the other three only able to watch in silence from either confusion or nervousness as to what Eleven was alluding towards. Eleven nodded her head in response to Mike's question. "From the bad men?" Eleven shook her head this time. "Then from who?" Mike asked, almost afraid to hear the answer.

Eleven then placed the figurine they all knew as the Demogorgon on the board beside Will's own, shivers racing up all four friends spines before they looked to each other.

Whatever it was Will's hiding from, if she used that for representation then Will was in a lot more trouble than they realized.

Somehow the three kids who didn't live their managed to convince Mrs. Wheeler to let them stay the night, even with school the next morning. For Erin, it was easier to convince Mrs. Wheeler because she only needed to remind her that her parents were still out of town.

For the other two though, they had to put in some work and convince her that it was too late at night and dangerous for them to bike home alone. The added measure of saying they wanted to be together because they were worried about Will also helped.

"Lights out in thirty. And don't even think about trying to stay up talking or playing your games. If we hear so much as a peep you'll all be sleeping in separate rooms." Mr. Wheeler said from the top of the

basement steps. Mike was a few steps below him and the other three, that Mr. Wheeler knew were in his basement, were at the bottom of the steps.

"Understood." Mike answered his fathers demand, letting out a sigh once the door clicked back shut.

"How are we supposed to do this? Most of the blankets and pillows are on that fort." Lucas reminded as he nodded his head towards Eleven's pillow fort, which she was still sitting within.

"We'll figure it out. We need to make a plan for tomorrow though. This time, we're going to find him and bring him home." Mike assured, walking away to go find something to use for all of them to sleep tonight.

Lucas and Dustin exchanged a nervous glance before peeking back in the direction of the girl in the pillow fort. They've never had sleep overs with girls before.

Well, aside from Erin. But she doesn't count.

The bathroom door opened, said girl in question walking out in pajamas and drying her hair. "Oh thank god, I've needed to pee for forever!" Dustin ran in the bathroom once she was out.

"There's a bathroom upstairs." Mike reminded as he began tossing blankets down on the floor.

"Why don't you just go grab the pillows and blankets from your closet?" Erin asked as she watched Mike set up sleeping spots. Said boy pressed his hand to the side of his face before running for the stairs.

Lucas smirked Erin's way. "You would know where the blankets and pillows are why?" Lucas asked teasingly, Erin flipping him off without hesitation.

"How often do my parents go out of town?" Erin asked in response, Lucas shrugging in response. "Babysitter Steve isn't that good of a babysitter, remember. Party this and girlfriend that, Mrs. Wheeler doesn't like the idea of me being alone in my house." Erin said with a

shrug of her own this time.

"I'm across the street, why Mike?" Lucas and Erin both turned to Dustin as he walked out of the bathroom, wiping his hands on his shirt.

"Because it's Mike." Lucas said flatly, losing his serious demeanor when Dustin actually looked offended by what he said. Lucas walked away while laughing to go get ready to lay down.

"I've got more pillows!" Mike announced from the top of the stairs, holding a stack of blankets and pillows in his arms.

"He's going to fall down the stairs..." Dustin muttered, watching Mike try to amble his way down the steps with no clear view of each step beneath him.

"Then help him." Erin chastised the curly haired lack of help before going up the few steps to help Mike.

Eleven watched from inside the pillow fort, idly toying with the super comm Mike had allowed her to use. She watched as the other girl, Erin, helped Mike carry more blankets and pillows down the stairs.

It was interesting, to see the way they all interacted together. So much different than the bad place, than the way the bad people treated her and the others. She saw a lot of what Erin described, the teasing, but the looks they all had when looking at each other spoke more.

They cared so much for each other, she could see that. They must feel this way about their friend too, the one in trouble.

Eleven looked up from the super comm again to see Lucas throw a pillow at Dustin's face, who then picked it back up and threw it back. This went back and forth for a minute until Erin too started throwing pillows.

Mike was trying to calm the situation, he was such a nice boy. She wondered if he ever behaved the way the other three did though, the smile on his face as he tried to get in the middle of it made her think he did.

Mike looked back over at her, smiling her way this time.

Eleven smiled back before looking back down at the super comm.

Why is it so easy to trust him when she's only just met him? Is he already her friend, is that why it's so easy to trust?

A warbled cry broke the pillow fight, Lucas and Dustin charging at each other with pillows held in front of themselves like shields before slamming into each other. With a thud, they slammed to the floor that was covered with blankets and began to tussle.

Erin cheered for them as Mike tried his hardest to get the two to quiet down. His dad was right upstairs, he might hear-

"Kids!"

The basement door swung open and Mrs. Wheeler stood in the doorway, staring down at the two boys wrestling around on the floor. "You're loud enough that I heard you all the way up in Holly's room. Quiet down, you have ten minutes then it's time for bed." Mrs. Wheeler lectured the children.

Eleven shrunk back into the fort at the sound of the adults voice, hand reaching up and pulling the blanket down.

She didn't like how close by the adults were. She didn't trust them. They'd send her back, they'd tell the bad men where she was.

The moment she heard the door click close again, she peeked out from under the blanket that hid her.

In time to see Erin tackle Mike into a pile of pillows.

Eleven flinched, unsure if this was the teasing that Erin explained or if they were fighting. She didn't want to see them fight, she didn't like it.

Erin laughed as Mike and her rolled before he pinned her to the ground, just then hearing a whimper over the commotion.

Looking over, she saw Eleven peeking out from under the blanket of

her fort with fear very obvious on her face.

"El?" Mike let her go and scrambled over to the girl without a seconds hesitation.

Erin snorted a little at how Mike was obviously so interested in this new girl, before pushing herself up off the floor to go help.

"It's okay, we're just playing. This is all just... some good old fun." Mike explained as he knelt down in front of the fort, Erin kneeling down beside him.

"It helps sometimes to forget the bad stuff by making more good." Erin joined him, smiling as it really did help them for a moment forget the worry and fear of what might have happened to their other best friend.

There was still that empty pit in their chests though at knowing they were one friend short.

"Good old fun." Eleven repeated Mike's words back at them. She looked conflicted for a moment, like she almost didn't believe them, before nodding and turning her eyes back down to the super comm.

Erin pursed her lips for a moment, unsure what to do or say to help, but her attention was pulled away when the sounds of Lucas and Dustin scrapping again reached her and she turned around to go join in the fun.

She wanted to act like everything was normal for at least a little longer. Because who knows what they're going to find out tomorrow when they go after Will again.

Minutes later, Mr. Wheeler was the one to throw open the door and tell the kids to go to bed. He didn't even leave the doorway until all four of them laid down in their respective spots.

Once the four kids, that the adults knew about, were sure they were in the clear they got back up.

"Okay, so tomorrow we're going back out." Mike began, sitting in the middle of a circle they had formed near the pillow fort so that Eleven



will feel included. "We just tell our parents we have AV club after school tomorrow. That'll give us at least a few hours for Operation Mirkwood." Mike said as he leaned closer to the middle of the circle.

"You seriously think that the weirdo knows where Will is?" Lucas asked, not caring that Eleven was sitting right there in the pillow fort and could obviously hear him.

"Just trust me on this, okay?" Mike replied to Lucas's doubt. "What is everyone going to be bringing for supplies tomorrow?" Mike asked, pulling out a piece of sheet paper that he had given all of them to write down what they intend on bringing for the search.

Lucas sighed before presenting his on the floor in front of them. "Binoculars... from 'Nam. Army knife, also from 'Nam. Hammer, camouflage bandanna... and the wrist rocket." Lucas revealed, smiling as he acted like he was pulling back an invisible slingshot for emphasis.

"You're going to take out the Demogorgon with a slingshot?" Dustin asked, expression flat and disbelieving that something so weak could take down something so strong.

"First of all, it's a wrist rocket. And second of all, the Demogorgon's not real. It's made up. But if there is something out there, I'm gonna shoot it in the eye..." Lucas pulled back his invisible slingshot and acted like he was firing it at Dustin, who flinched out of habit even though it was fake. "And blind it." Lucas grinned, actually excited at the idea of getting to use his wrist rocket on something if need be.

Mike sighed before turning to Dustin. "Dustin, what are you gonna get?" Mike asked, the toothless boy pulling out his crinkled up paper next.

"Well, alrighty, I'm gonna bring..." Dustin began with a smile. "Nutty bars, Bazooka, Pez, Smarties, Pringles, Nilla Wafers, apples, bananas, and trail mix." Dustin announced, unaware of the looks his friends were exchanging until he looked up with a big toothless grin.

"Seriously?" Lucas asked, not sure if they should actually believe this. It is Dustin though, and if he's actually going to bring nothing but

food then they're gonna have a problem. He might just use his wrist rocket to shoot Dustin in the ass.

"We need energy for our travels. For stamina. And besides, why do we even need weapons anyway? We have her." Dustin reminded as he gestured towards the girl sitting behind Mike in the pillow fort.

"She shut one door!" Lucas reminded, slamming his hand down on his paper on the floor before him.

"With her mind!" Dustin argued right back with Lucas. "Are you kidding me? That's insane! Imagine all the other cool stuff she could do." Dustin waved a hand towards Eleven, who didn't look too amused by his referring to her as a weapon. His eyes were lit up with excitement though. "Like..." Dustin jumped up and ran over to the other side of the basement.

He came back with Mike's Millennium Falcon. "I bet she could make this fly." Dustin bartered, nearly bouncing with excitement as he held the toy. "Hey. Hey." Dustin stood in front of Eleven, who was messing with Mike's super comm again. "Okay, concentrate. Okay?" Dustin let go of the toy, and it loudly clattered to the floor instead of hovering like he had hoped. "Okay, one more time." Dustin wasn't so quick to give up.

Eleven watched him pick the toy up, briefly looking to Mike and Erin who were none too amused like herself.

"Use your powers, okay?" Dustin reminded as he once more held the toy up for her to make it fly. It clattered to the floor again, Eleven unwilling to make it fly just because he asked her to.

"Idiot." Lucas and Erin both grumbled at the same time.

"She's not a dog." Mike berated Dustin's attempt to coerce Eleven into making the toy fly.

"What's going on down there?" The two boys standing up immediately scattered back for their sleeping spots before the door opened. "What is that noise?" Mr. Wheeler questioned as he stood once more in the doorway.

"We were just trying to get more comfortable." Mike lied smoothly, stretching in his blankets as he looked up the stairs.

Mr. Wheeler's jaw set, but he let it go and the door closed once more.

All the kids sighed in relief once the door clicked shut.

"Nice job, dingus." Lucas hissed to Dustin who was hiding beneath his blankets in an attempt to fake that he was already asleep.

"Ignore him." Eleven peeked out from under the blanket she pulled down when Mike's dad came back to see Erin on the other side. "He speaks faster than his brain can remind him what he's saying is stupid." Erin explained with a small smile, Lucas snickering nearby while Dustin whined openly at the insult.

"Why're you so mean to me?" Dustin complained, rolling over away from his friend who just didn't understand he was genuinely excited by the fact they met someone with actual super powers. That this wasn't a comic or movie, this was real.

Eleven noticed the way Erin's smile faltered, tilting her head before watching as Erin crawled back over towards the curly haired boy.

"Ooh." Lucas and Mike both oohed as Erin crawled up to Dustin, the girl sending them a sharp glare that scared them a little because of how bright her eyes were even in the semi darkness of the basement.

"Would a three musketeer make it better?" Dustin immediately rolled over, eyes lighting up at the offer of his favorite candy bar.

Mike and Lucas snickered like school girls from the scene, wanting so badly to say something but both knowing they can't risk being caught up again.

Eleven watched the scene unfold, and the way the curly haired boy once more was happy when Erin handed him a candy bar after digging into her backpack. After the other two boys laughed a little more, they all finally settled down in their blankets.

"Oh, I forgot, what're you bringing tomorrow Erin?" Mike asked, stifling a yawn.

"I'll show you tomorrow. I'm going to sleep." Erin replied, rolling over onto her side. The last sight she saw before closing her eyes was the shaven haired girl laying down in the pillow fort a mere foot away.

"Goodnight, everybody."

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*A bright light shined above her, ducking her head and instead looking at the sterile white tiles beneath her bare feet. The light hurt her head.*

*Her arms wrapped around her body as she rocked back and forth on her heels in the small, claustrophobic room. Those nasty maroon walls were too close, this room was too small.*

*The rusty metal door in front of her hadn't opened in forever. Have they forgotten? She wanted to leave, please don't forget! Please! Let her out!*

*Her hands reached forward and banged on the door loudly, the sound echoing in the small empty room as she banged again and again and again. Until the point where her hands began to hurt.*

*There was no answer. The door did not open at her banging. It remained shut.*

"Papa!"

*The door swung open at last, and she finally took a breath.*

*Only to scream when she was grabbed by the arms and shoulders and hauled off her feet.*

"Papa! No, please! Papa!"

---

Erin eyes flew open, gasping as a cold sweat settled on her skin. She could still feel the hands on her.

She moved her arms to rub away the feeling, only to realize that wasn't her dream. Looking back at her arms stretched above her head, she noticed Eleven's hand on her wrist. The girl herself sound asleep. Did she move in her sleep?

"What's wrong?" Erin flinched, pulling her arms to her chest in fear before looking up and seeing Mike tiredly leaning up on his arms. "You're breathing heavy, what's wrong?" Mike asked as he crawled over to her, worry overshadowing his tiredness.

"Just... just a nightmare. I'm okay." Erin said it more for herself than for Mike, wanting the feeling of those hands grabbing her and the tightness of that room to fade away. She never wanted to be there again.

"Are you sure?" Mike asked, laying down next to her as he tiredly rubbed at his eyes.

"I'll be fine." Erin assured, but Mike just rolled over onto his side and opened his arms to her. Without hesitation, she crawled over to him and hugged him.

Her eyes trailed to Eleven, still asleep nearby. What was that dream, what was that place? And who's Papa?

---

*Okay, finally getting started with Eleven and, as you can see, branching a little bit away from the script. It's a bit interesting trying to write for Eleven, I'm enjoying myself with this work. As proven by how quick I'm writing this out. Well, I also am watching the episodes as I type, so...*

*Ooh, that ending though. That's some nightmare, or is it really a nightmare? Guess we're going to have to wait to find out what that was, where that was. I just wanna address real quick though, don't think that they're forgetting about Will or anything because of the play fighting. They're all still kids, kids can only take so much of the real world. They're smart, and subconsciously know how to diffuse the stresses and fears while still keeping on task.*

*Small moments of good help handle the bad easier, after all.*

*Anyways, thanks as always for reading! I don't know how to feel about the lack of views or comments on this, but I'm still gonna keep working on it because I genuinely enjoy writing this. I'm gonna go start the next chapter, so I'll see you guys later!*

## 5. The Truth

The four friends meandered around the school yard, stooping down every time they found a rock and checking it before letting it fall back to the ground and looking elsewhere. They were using their free time in school to search for rocks for Lucas' slingshot.

"How about this one?" Mike asked as he held up a rock for the other three to see, unsure if it was too big or not.

"Too big for the sling." Dustin answered after taking the stone and looking at it closer. He let it fall back to the ground. "So, do you think Eleven was born with her powers, like the X-Men, or do you think she acquired them, like... like Green Lantern?" Dustin asked as he stooped down to check another rock.

"She's not a superhero. She's a super weirdo." Lucas corrected Dustin, rolling his eyes at the girl who managed to shut one door.

"Why does that matter? The X-Men are weirdos." Mike argued, arms out around him as there was nothing wrong with Eleven. She was just... different.

"If you love her so much, why don't you marry her?" Lucas offered mockingly, turning to Mike with a teasing smile because it was way too obvious.

"What are you talking about?" Mike asked, turning to Erin when she snorted from where she stood behind him.

"Seriously?" Erin asked, Lucas and her exchanging a knowing look as they both were on the same page on this.

"What?" Mike asked, flailing his arms out around him once more.

"You look at her all, like... 'Hi, El. El, El, El! El!'" Lucas mocked, voice higher pitched as he got closer and closer to Mike.

"I love you so much, El!" Erin joined in, leaning on Mike's shoulders from behind as the boy's face fell to a flat glare at the insinuation they were making.

"Would you marry me?" Lucas continued, hugging himself into Mike before dropping to one knee in front of him for dramatics, Dustin beginning to laugh at the scene.

"Shut up, Lucas." Mike growled as Lucas continued whining and teasing him as he stood up.

"Yeah, shut up, Lucas."

The moment of fun teasing was broken by the one voice none of them liked to hear. Troy and James walking up to the four with James snickering at Troy's insult. "What are you losers doing back here?" Troy questioned them, standing in front of Mike.

"Probably looking for their missing friend." James remarked with a nasty smirk on his face.

"That's not funny." Dustin spoke up, glaring slightly at the two bullies.

"He's in danger, that's serious." Erin snarled, for once talking back to the bullies instead of falling behind the boys or running off.

Troy scoffed, stepping closer to them. "So you can speak, Bright Eyes. Too bad its over the queer. Sorry to break it to you though, but he's not in danger. He's dead! That's what my old man says. Said he was probably killed by some other queer." Troy and James began laughing at their own hateful words, Dustin and Erin visibly becoming enraged by how the bullies were talking about their friend.

"Come on, just ignore them." Mike reminded the two, not wanting any more than a fight than they were already going to have to put up with.

"You and your old man are a liar." Erin's words were quiet, but scary as she glared up at the two boys who now began to quiet their laughter.

"What did you say?" James took a threatening step closer to the girl.

"Erin, don't." Lucas warned her, putting a hand on her shoulder. Who knows what Troy or James would do to her. They've never done more than poke and touch her without her consent, if she fights back they

might actually hurt her the way they do to them.

Mike went to walk past the two bullies to try to diffuse the situation, but Troy stuck a foot out and tripped him. Mike slammed to the ground and his chin bounced off a stone, the boy groaning in pain.

"Watch how you treat me next time, Bright Eyes. And you watch where you're going, Frog Face." Troy mocked, high-fiving James before the two of them walked away.

Dustin and Lucas rushed over to help Mike up as Erin's anger visibly deflated, guilt replacing it as she watched the other two boys help Mike up. Who was bleeding from his chin where it hit the stone.

"You alright" Lucas asked as he and Dustin helped Mike to his feet.

"Yeah." Mike assured, pressing his fingers to his chin and pulling them back to see the blood on them. He glared after the bullies as they sauntered off to torment some other poor kid.

"Hey, how about this one?" Dustin held the stone that Mike had bounced his chin off of, having grabbed it after Mike was up again.

"Yeah." Mike agreed, smiling again as Dustin patted him on the shoulder. "Yeah, this is it." Mike agreed, the three boys smiling once more.

Until they realized that they were missing someone, looking around in confusion when they noticed Erin was gone.

---

Eleven looked up at the lines through the sky, unsure if she was in the right place but hoping she was. Mike said meet beneath the power lines.

If she wasn't, would Mike look for her? She hoped he would. Mike was a nice boy, he wouldn't just leave her. Plus, she was helping them find their friend.

Eleven whirled around when she heard leaves crunching, her breathing hitching until she realized it was Erin, who too looked surprised to see her.



"Eleven? Why are you here already, it's only two." Erin reminded as she looked down at the watch on her wrist to make sure she was right before kicking the stand out for her bike.

"Mike said three one five. Power lines." Eleven pointed up at the lines in the sky above them.

"Yeah, that's still over an hour away." Erin explained, dropping her now filled backpack beside one of the utility poles.

"You're here." Eleven muttered, confused because Mike had said they would be there at three one five. But Erin was here, so where are the others?

"Yeah I shouldn't be though." Erin ruefully remarked, Eleven tilting her head in confusion to what Erin meant. "I skipped our last few classes."

"Skipped?" Eleven asked, sitting down beside Erin when the blue eyed girl sat down against one of the poles.

"It means I didn't go to my classes." Erin answered, pulling her knees up to wrap her arms around them. "Mike got hurt during recess. I don't like seeing my friends hurt." Eleven's eyes widened at Erin's words, breathing hitching.

"Hurt? By the bad men?" Erin turned to her, looking confused for a moment.

"Oh you mean the people who are after you." Erin muttered quietly. "No, they're not those bad men. He was hurt by bullies. Probably because I talked back against them." Erin muttered the latter half even quieter, Eleven frowning a little.

"Bullies?" Eleven asked, though she knew that Erin was unhappy she wanted to know what the word meant.

"Bad kids who do bad things to good kids." Erin answered without giving Eleven a look. "They bully the boys, and I hate it and I wish I was strong enough or brave enough to do something about it. They said something about Will today, and I talked back. Then they hurt Mike." Erin explained, seemingly shrinking in on herself as she spoke.

Eleven placed a hand on Erin's shoulder the way she saw Mike do, patting it. Erin looked so sad, she didn't like seeing her sad. She has seen herself look the way Erin does right now so much back at the bad place, she doesn't think any of the friends deserve to be sad.

Eleven continued patting Erin on the shoulder until she sat up straight again.

"Alright, enough gushy sad talk." Erin said before pulling her bag in front of her. "Since we're both early, might as well pass the time with something nicer." Erin offered as she started to dig through her bag.

"Nicer?" Eleven asked, leaning over to look in the overstuffed backpack. She was curious to see what all she had in her bag.

"Most of this is for the search, but I brought..." Erin trailed off before pulling out a little device. "My Walkman." Erin finished as she pulled out a wire that was attached to the little electronic and something else came out of the bag.

Eleven poked at the little device curiously, never having seen anything like it.

"Kids use these to listen to music. Here, try." Erin put the device attached with a wire on her head before pressing a button on the Walkman as she called it.

Eleven flinched when sound suddenly began blasting in her ears, about to pull off the device when it turned down. Erin mouthed something to her over the music, before Eleven pulled the thing off her ears.

"Sorry, I forgot how loud those new headphones get." Erin flashed her a smile, and Eleven smiled back softly before putting the headphones as she called them back on.

A man was singing in the headphones, singing was something she vaguely remembered one of the men from the bad place doing every so often. The voice in the headphones was loud, but she kind of liked it.

"That's the King of Rock, Elvis Presley." Erin's voice was quiet behind

the headphones on her head. "Will and I usually listen to him together." Erin revealed, grinning ear to ear as Eleven smiled back at her.

"The King?" Eleven asked after pulling the headphones off again, the man in the middle of singing about something called a jailhouse.

"It's a word used to describe someone who's the leader of something. Elvis was the King of Rock. Technically I guess you could call Mike the King of our party, but we don't really use titles." Erin said with a shrug of her shoulders.

Yes, Eleven could see from the moment she met them all that Mike was the leader. He takes charge, and he stops the other boys from being mean.

"I have other music too, if you wanna try it." Erin began digging in her bag again, Eleven watching her for a moment in how happy she became now that she was talking about this sound that came from the Walkman.

Eleven smiled back at her when Erin held up a little plastic square with a toothy grin.

---

"She's probably either at home or she's already out searching for Will. You heard that messed up shit Troy said, you know how close Will and her are." Lucas tried to reason with Mike, peddling quickly to keep up with his friend who the moment school was over raced out to his bike to go find Erin.

"She wouldn't do that!" Dustin called up to them from behind, where he was huffing and puffing between words but keeping up with them somewhat fine.

"Erin never skips school. Especially not in the middle of the day." Mike said as they peeled around a corner on their path to go get Eleven before they go find Erin.

"And Troy usually doesn't say fucked up shit like that to her, does he?" Lucas countered, Mike rolling his eyes at him because both of

them knew Troy has done a lot of messed up things, especially to the four of them since they were boys. But because Erin's a girl she was spared the shoves, punches, kicks and shoulder checks they were used to.

Erin just got the verbal abuse that made all of their blood boil even more.

Before Mike could further explain Erin wouldn't do something like this, the power lines came into sight. As well as two girls instead of the one they were expecting. Mike just braked, staring at the scene of the two of them sharing a Walkman and bobbing their heads.

"Dancing to the jailhouse rock!" Erin's voice broke him out of his staring as he ran over to them.

"Where did you go?" Mike didn't mean to yell, and he immediately felt bad when Eleven flinched and shot to her feet with a look of fear. "El, I'm sorry I didn't mean to scare you." Mike apologized immediately as he walked up with his hands up.

"I went to my house and got my stuff then I came here to wait for you guys. El was here when I got here, so we've been listening to my Walkman." Erin answered him as she too stood up.

"You can't just take off like that and not tell us!" Dustin uncharacteristically was the one to yell next. "What about Will? We thought something might have happened to you too." Dustin was still huffing and puffing from the fast ride there, but his words still showed his anger.

"I told you guys she was fine." Lucas immediately received a death glare from the other two boys, holding his hands up in surrender.

"I just..." Erin trailed off as she put her Walkman away. "I didn't want to be there anymore, okay?" Erin asked, hoping they would just take that and drop it. She didn't want to think about how cowardly she was that she couldn't help her best friends, or that she pushed Troy to hurt Mike by snapping at him.

"No, no that's not okay." Mike walked over to stand in front of her.

"Why did you leave? Because leaving like that just left all three of us freaking out for the rest of school thinking you were gone now too, Erin!" Mike was smart this time and kept his voice level so as not to scare Eleven.

"Bullies." Eleven spoke before Erin could.

"What?" Lucas asked, unsure if he was misunderstanding but ready to yell if she was calling them the bullies for being mad at Erin for taking off like she did.

Eleven walked over beside Erin and placed a hand on Mike's chin. "The bullies hurt you." Eleven said as she looked at the dried blood on Mike's chin, said boy's face turning a bright red over having his face touched like this.

"W-what? No... I just fell at recess." Mike tried to convince her, he didn't want her to think littler of him because he got picked on at school.

"Mike... friends tell the truth." Eleven reminded him of what he told her. "Erin told the truth, she didn't like it." Eleven said before looking to Erin who was now looking down at the ground beneath her sneakers.

"What?" Mike asked, confused as he looked at the silent girl in front of him trying to hide behind her black bangs. "Erin you left because they tripped me?" Mike asked, only further confused once he let that roll around in his head because Erin has been first witness to him being knocked around by Troy on many occasions. So what's different about this time?

"Yes." Erin answered. "It was my fault." Erin answered as she looked up at him, Mike's previous anger completely fading when he saw the sad look in her blue eyes.

"No it wasn't, you know Troy hurts us all the time. How could you think it was your fault?" Mike asked as Lucas and Dustin came up behind him.

"Because I fought back this time. I called him a liar for what he said

about Will." Erin reminded him, because this was the first time she actually fought back against Troy and James.

"That doesn't mean it was your fault." Lucas butted into the conversation between the two. "Those two mouth breathers probably would have tripped him even if you hadn't." Lucas grumbled, rolling his eyes at the two bullies.

"Why didn't you just stay and tell me then, instead of leaving like that?" Mike asked, noticing the way Erin was unusually shy around them when she hadn't been shy with them in years.

"Friends tell the truth." Eleven nudged Erin in the shoulder with that phrase, Mike just then realizing how comfortable the two girls were around one another. When did this happen?

"I don't like seeing you guys get hurt by them, or how you guys always worry about me around them. I hate that I'm not strong or brave enough to do something to stop it." Erin revealed to her friends, eyes glossing a little as she looked up at Mike. "Look at what they say about Will, look at what they did to you." Erin pointed at his bloodied chin. "I-I just..." Erin was cut short by Mike wrapping his arms around her in a hug.

"You don't have to protect us from them." Mike reminded her, because they all helped each other together and protected each other together.

Lucas and Dustin joined the hug, putting Erin in the middle of a group hug as she hugged back into the three of them tightly.

"You lie, you are too brave." Lucas chimed in, grinning down at Erin when she pulled her face out of Mike's coat. "You called Troy and James liars, have you ever heard us do that?" Lucas laughed a little, Mike and Dustin joining him because they all knew it was true.

"You don't have to be strong for us either, its our jobs to protect you. You're our elf." Dustin joined in as well, laughing when he heard an annoyed grunt for calling her by her race after saying she doesn't have to be strong.

"She's strong." Mike corrected Dustin. "Look at how quick she outruns those mouth breathers. Only someone who's strong can run that fast." Mike offered, smiling a little softer when he felt Erin hug into him tighter.

"Mouth breathers?" The sweet moment was joined by Eleven who stood at Mike's side with a confused look at the word he used.

"It's a dumb person, a knucklehead." Mike explained as the other three began to laugh and pull out of the group hug.

"Knucklehead?" Eleven asked, only further confused by Mike's explanation.

"So does anyone think it's time we go start looking for Will?" Dustin asked as he looked down at his watch.

"Shit, he's right. We only have a few hours." Lucas reminded them of the time constraint as the two ran over and hopped back on their bikes.

"Thanks." Mike looked back at the two girls after he was back on his own bike, having heard Erin's voice. "For helping me talk to them and for being a good friend." Mike smiled at the sight, glad to see Erin was getting over her shyness and being friendly with their new friend.

---

The five kids walked through the woods somewhat quietly, somewhat being that the only ones really saying anything were Mike and Eleven who were leading the way.

The other three just walked their bikes behind them in silence, occasionally exchanging glances at how Mike was so obviously interested in Eleven.

Lucas made kissing faces at Erin after nodding towards Mike, Erin snorting and Dustin smiling at the continued teasing from earlier in the day.

Dustin acted like he was going down on one knee briefly, Lucas and Erin snickering louder. He immediately shot right back up when Mike

started to turn back towards them.

Mike narrowed his eyes when he noticed the innocent looks his three friends were giving him before turning back ahead. "Will's great, just wait till you meet him." Mike continued his mostly one sided conversation with Eleven.

The three behind him started snickering again.

Soon it began to get dark out, and Lucas moved up beside Mike to try to convince him that they needed more of a plan than to just walk around in the woods on the word of some weirdo who shut a door.

Dustin walked beside Erin now as she leaned more on her handlebars while walking, both of them getting tired of the trekking.

They've been walking for so long now...

"Are you okay?" Erin leaned up from her handlebars a little at hearing Dustin's voice over the mind numbing boringness of the quiet walk.

"Yeah." Erin answered, but noticed the way Dustin didn't seem to look relieved by her answer. "What?" Erin asked, watching the way he looked ahead at Mike and Lucas instead of at her now.

"I'm sorry, about earlier." Dustin spoke again after a minute of silence, Erin giving him a confused glance at what he had to be sorry about. He noticed it, because he continued. "About yelling at you, for not telling us where you were going and just leaving school."

"Oh." Erin had honestly forgotten that Dustin raised his voice over the telling them how she actually feels about the bullies thing. She didn't like sharing her feelings, maybe it's because the boys didn't really either. Maybe it's because she doesn't want them to worry.

They already do enough worrying about her when around those shit heads just because Troy abuses the fact that she's a girl by harassing her.

"Yeah I feel like shit about that." Dustin nervously chuckled, eyes going back to the walk in front of them. "I just didn't know you were



that bothered by how those dicks treat us. You only really share with Will." Erin frowned at the reminder, genuinely missing her best friend and hoping they find him tonight.

Will was always first to get things out of her that she hid. Probably because he was shy like her, so he understood. Mike understood too, of course, but Erin felt bad if she went to him too often because he would then do everything in his power to try to help fix it. Will would just listen and help if she asked.

"Of course I'm bothered by it." Erin answered him after taking a moment to quell her worry for Will. "It's not fair, any of it. I want to do something to help, but how can I help when Troy is such a troglodyte and could probably toss me around if it weren't for my being-."

"We wouldn't let him." Dustin cut her off mid sentence, Erin chuckling softly at the protective glare he held on the ground in front of them. "It's bad enough we can't stop him from what he already does to you, but we'd beat the hell out of him if he ever laid a hand on you to hurt you." Dustin continued honestly, Erin smiling at how protective he was being.

"Thank you, Toothless." Erin said simply instead of what she really wanted to say, which was that she would actually like to see them knock Troy's lights out.

"Anytime, Bright Eyes." Dustin replied with her own nickname, smiling that signature toothless smile at her when she rolled her eyes at him.

"Ooh." Lucas butted into their nice moment with a teasing smile on his face. "What's-"

"Don't."

Erin sent him a warning glare, because she didn't want the nice moment ruined by Lucas teasing them about being nice and friendly instead of teasingly friendly like they usually are.

"Seriously though, it's getting dark out. Are we getting close?" Lucas

asked after turning his attention back to Mike and Eleven.

Erin glanced back at Dustin out of the corner of her eye to see he was still smiling even considering Lucas butting into their talk. Erin smiled a little again herself before focusing back on their search.

Before long it was fully dark, and the trees were beginning to thin in showing they were nearly out of the woods. But still there was no sign of Will or indication that they were close by Eleven.

After a few more minutes, they were out of the woods and in front of the Byers house. "Here." Eleven said as she turned to Mike, all four of them looking to her before back at the house.

"Yeah, this is where Will lives." Mike revealed, pointing at the dark house.

"Hiding." Eleven said simply, serious as she kept her eyes on Mike in hopes that he would understand.

"El, this is where Will lives." Erin repeated what Mike already told her.

"He's missing from here. Understand?" Mike asked, not seeing how he could be hiding where he lived. The police have surely searched this whole area already, so if they didn't find him he wasn't here.

"Will can't be hiding in the place where he's missing from, Eleven. People already looked for him here." Erin tried to help El understand, but the girl didn't seem convinced by either of them and looked back at the house again.

"What are we doing here?" Lucas asked, dropping his bike to the ground as he and Dustin walked up to the three.

"She said he's hiding here." Mike explained, which only earned a disgruntled groan and look from Lucas for telling him Eleven's words.

"Um... no!" Lucas growled, rolling his eyes as he glared at the girl who dragged them to the wrong place.

"I swear, if we walked all the way out here for nothing-"

"That's exactly what we did!" Lucas interrupted Dustin, throwing his hands up in the air from exasperation over the fact that they listened to the weirdo to begin with. "I told you she didn't know what the hell she was talking about!" Lucas yelled at Mike, fuming mad.

Mike's gaze fell flat as he turned to Eleven. "Why did you bring us here?" Mike asked, and all Eleven could do was stammer nervously over how angry the three boys were. How was she supposed to explain to them what they couldn't possibly believe?

"Mike, don't waste your time with her." Lucas growled, folding his arms over his chest angrily.

Erin flatly stared ahead as the boys bickered, looking to Eleven in frustration over how they walked out here and didn't find Will. But then she started to hear something. Sirens. "Guys, shut up!" Erin snapped, focusing as the sound got closer. "Do you hear that?" Erin asked, all five of them looking to the road in time to see cop cars and an ambulance shoot past.

"Will..." Mike muttered before they all grabbed their bikes and took off after them.

The kids have never peddled faster in their life, following the sounds of the sirens through the night until they reached the quarry. There was a lot of emergency vehicles around, and each one of them felt their hearts dropping in their chests as they ditched their bikes to run and hide behind a fire truck to see. To know if this was when they'd find Will.

They got there just in time to see the adults pulling a body out of the water. A kids body. It can't be...

"It's not Will." Mike tried to reason, the five watching the officers pull the body to shore. It was then that they noticed the clothes on the body.

"It's Will. It's really Will." Lucas muttered, his eyes beginning to tear up as the truth started to settle in.

"No..." Erin whimpered as tears began to run at watching the body,

her best friend, be pulled from the water. Mike stepped back, covering his lower face with a hand.

"Mike..." Eleven's hand was smacked away by Mike.

"Mike? 'Mike,' what?" Mike snapped at Eleven, unable to believe that she lied to them, to him. "You were supposed to help us find him alive!" Mike reminded, anger winning out against his grief. "You said he was alive! Why did you lie to us?" Mike's voice rose higher and higher as the truth began to settle in him. "What's wrong with you? What is wrong with you?!"

"Mike, stop..." Erin tried even through the tears to help the other upset girl, but Mike smacked her hand away before turning and stalking over to his bike.

"Mike, come on. Don't do this, man." Lucas begged their upset best friend not to leave.

"Mike, where are you going? Mike!" Dustin's wavering voice called after Mike who just rode off into the night.

A cry broke the boys from calling after Mike. Erin collapsed against the side of the fire truck as she watched her best friend be put into a black body bag, tears flooding down her face as Lucas and Dustin cried openly as well.

The two boys dropped down onto the ground beside her, each wrapping their arms around her and the other on the other side as they cried with her. Their grief mixing in the night as the truth stabbed them each in the heart.

Will was gone. Their best friend was gone. They failed to save him, and they'd never see him again.

Holding one another tighter, they all knew nothing was ever going to be the same.

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***That scene at the end of the episode gets me .TIME! Got me the most this time because I had to work it into here. I knew this chapter would end with this too, so it was a bit harder to finish the chapter***

*because I knew it would be sad. Our party is broken, their hearts are shattered.*

*We saw more interaction with Eleven this time. The bonding was so sweet, music is always the best thing to bond over.*

*Thank you all so much for still reading! I'm enjoying working on this, so it makes me so happy to see the amount of views each chapter gets when they come out. Let me know how you feel about this chapter, by the way! This is probably the best one so far because it's starting to get less scripted now that I'm finally getting back into the writing motion and knowing better what I want for this.*

*Thanks so much for reading! I'm gonna go start the next chapter, see you then!*

## 6. Always On Our Minds

*Tell me, tell me that your sweet love hasn't died*

*Give me, give me one more chance*

*To keep you satisfied, satisfied*

*Little things I should have said and done*

*I just never took the time*

*You were always on my mind*

Elvis's song Always on my Mind played at full volume throughout the Wakeman residence, Dustin able to hear it clear across the street from his front lawn and even understand the lyrics.

After they left the quarry to go home, Erin hadn't said a word and just went into her house and he's heard that same song play on repeat the entire time.

Dustin wanted to help, but he's not sure he even can. Will or Mike always help Erin, they always know the right thing to do or say.

And right now they're all heartbroken about Will, so how is he supposed to help her?

"Dusty, sweetheart, just go over there." Dustin looked behind him to see his mom standing at the front door of their house. "Go bring her here for the night, she shouldn't be alone. Neither should you." Dustin frowned and rubbed at his eyes one more time before standing up to do as she said.

The music was headache inducing loud once he was standing on the front step of the Wakeman residence, realizing there was no way in hell she was going to hear him if he knocked.

Dustin walked around the side of the house to where her bedroom window was and jumped up to grab onto the window ledge.

Struggling to hold himself up, he smacked a hand against the window a few times before holding himself up with all his strength to look in.

The window slid open, and he was grabbed by the scruff of his collar by the douche bag that babysits her.

"What the hell are you doing? You're gonna hurt yourself." Steve chastised him once he was back on his feet inside the house.

"I didn't think she'd hear me knock on the front door. Where is she? Why're you in her room?" Dustin asked as he looked up at the teenager that usually wasn't even here when he was supposed to be babysitting Erin.

"I'm looking for something else to put on the record than that same damn song again and again and again." Steve answered, motioning the repetitiveness of the song with his hands as he walked over to a shelf filled with vinyl records. "Erin's in the basement, only reason why the music is so loud I think."

"My mom told me to bring her to our house for tonight, so I'm gonna go get her." Dustin left before letting Steve get another word in.

On the way through the house he stopped in the living room to turn down the record player before going down the basement steps.

The Wakeman's basement wasn't as nice as the Wheelers, but it was nice in its own way. It was smaller than Mike's, but more cozy with carpets all on the floor and big comfy couches. Even a nice TV set.

Erin was laid with her back to the stairs on one of the couches, curled into a ball, when Dustin reached the bottom of the steps.

"Go away." Erin said before he could even say anything to him, and his chest hurt a little more at the hoarseness of her voice and the sniffing she gave after.

"I'm not the douche, you sure you want me to go away?" Dustin asked, hoping somehow that would help because they did enjoy mocking the babysitter.

Erin looked at him over her shoulder but turned her head back to the couch without a word.

Dustin frowned and walked over anyways, climbing onto the couch beside her since there was plenty of room. "I know nothing's gonna help." Dustin muttered quietly as he heard the music finally cut off upstairs.

Erin sniffled again and he felt his heart crack even more, if possible.

"I-I know I'm not... I'm not Mike or W-Will..." Dustin had to take a breath to keep himself from crying again. "But I'm here. I'm here to help you or listen. Just sit here..." Dustin offered, frowning when he noticed she was shaking again like earlier at the quarry.

Dustin laid down on the couch beside her, and they just stayed like that for a while. Not talking, not moving, just grieving together beside one another.

Dustin wiped at his wet eyes again when Erin turned around to face towards him on the couch. "How are we supposed to get past this?" Dustin hated the sight of tears in her eyes he realized that night.

Erin never cried, he has only seen her tear up once before this. And he hated it.

"I don't know." Dustin answered honestly, lip trembling when another whimper left his friend. He hugged her this time, pulling her face into his shoulder as they cried once more over Will's fate.

Steve rubbed a hand over his face as he let Mrs. Henderson into the house to get her son. He wasn't sure how to handle the situation with Erin. He's never lost anyone before, he can't begin to imagine how she feels or what's going through her head.

Of course he's worried about her, and he wants to help because he knows that's the right thing. But the kid won't even let him in the basement without shouting at him to leave her alone.

They might not always get along, but he still cares about her. If he didn't he wouldn't have let the little toothless kid in her window, after all. Or agree to babysit her, for that matter.



Mrs. Henderson came back up from the basement a few minutes later. "They're asleep on the couch." Mrs. Henderson revealed, and his jaw almost dropped at how that kid managed to get her to sleep.

"They are? Well what do you want to do? You want to wake them up?" Steve asked, unsure of the proper reaction to this because the Wakeman's never clarified if it was okay if Erin had other kids spend the night.

Would be great if they answered the phone and came home to comfort their kid.

"Let them sleep. They both must be exhausted, poor things. It's so terrible what happened." Mrs. Henderson shook her head in sadness, Steve frowning since it really was. He's seen Will around with the other four, they looked closer friends than he even was with his own. "If you want to go home, you can sweetie. Be with your family. I'll stay here to take care of them." Mrs. Henderson offered, hugging him in one of those warm hugs that no one can resist.

"But what about the Wakeman's?" Steve asked, not exactly sure how the parents would feel about the neighbor being in their house even if it was over something serious like this.

"Oh don't you worry. They'll understand, we've been friends since they first moved in. I'm sure they won't mind me watching their daughter for a night." Mrs. Henderson assured him with a warm motherly smile, and he reluctantly agreed to her suggestion.

Mrs. Henderson being around might help Erin more than him being there. Maybe one day he can help her, if she's ready for it.

---

"Just listen to it, trust me." Erin took the offered headphones from Will, pulling them on over her ears before he hit play on the Walkman.

Erin listened to about half the song before taking her headphones back off. "It's not bad, but how can you like this more than the King?" Erin asked as she presented her treasured Elvis Presley mix tape.

"Come on, don't you ever get curious about other music? Or tired of listening to songs that came out long before we were even born?" Will asked, smiling teasingly at her as he took back his headphones from Erin.

"Nope!" Erin chimed, grinning at him when he scoffed dramatically at her love for Elvis over all else.

"I'll find something else you like one day." Will promised her with a wag of his finger at her, Erin laughing at him.

"Good luck with that, Gandalf." Erin stuck her tongue out at him when he narrowed his eyes playfully at her.

"Hey you two, come on! We've got an adventure to get started!" Lucas's voice boomed into the Wakeman residence through Erin's open window, the two kids jumping up and looking out the window to see their other three friends outside waiting on them.

"We'll be right out!" Will called back before they ran to grab their bags.

"I'll find other music you like one day too, Will. Music that Jonathan doesn't give you to listen to first." Erin promised with a grin at him before grabbing him by the hand and pulling him out the door to go join their friends.

---

Erin stirred her cereal around absentmindedly, not hungry but knowing Mrs. Henderson probably won't let her go back to the basement unless she tries for her at least.

Mrs. Henderson took a sip from her coffee as she watched the way the two kids just pushed their food around, not eating again. "Sweethearts, I know you don't want to but you need to eat. You're going to get sick if you don't." Mrs. Henderson reminded them of what they no doubt knew.

Her son was smart, and she knew the girl next door was smart too. Probably why her little Dusty was so protective of her.

The two children looked up at her briefly before reluctantly taking a

bite each of their cereal.

Once Mrs. Henderson was appeased, Erin retreated once again to the basement. The woman sighed but knew she needed time. She needed to grieve in her own way. "Dusty, I have to get to work. I'll see you tonight." With that Mrs. Henderson kissed her boy on the top of the head before heading out.

Dustin just sat at the kitchen table for a little longer before getting up to go back downstairs with Erin. He barely left the kitchen when a pounding at the front door diverted his path.

"Dustin?" Dustin opened the door to see Lucas, just as confused as he was on why he was here. He didn't expect to see him or Mike until school, considering last night. "Mike's calling for us to come over, where's Erin?" Lucas asked while trying to look around him.

"Basement." Dustin stepped aside to let Lucas come in.

Erin was in the same spot on the couch as last night, the only difference being a blanket thrown over her to hide under.

"Hey, Mike wants us all to come to his house right now." Lucas said to the mourning girl on the couch.

"No."

"Erin, it's important. He didn't tell me what it's about, but he said it's about Will." Lucas explained as he sat down on the other end of the couch from his blanket covered friend.

"What about Will?" Dustin asked, not wanting to go if what this was going to be about was Will's funeral or anything else they're not ready for right now.

"I don't know. He just said get over there." Lucas said with a shrug of his shoulders. "Come on, I don't really want to either but we should all be together. Handling things this way won't help us." Lucas said to Erin who finally threw the blanket off of her to look his way.

"Fine."

The trek to Mike's house was slow, but eventually they arrived and went through the basement door to find Mike and Eleven waiting for them. Lucas and Dustin were a little surprised to see Eleven still around, with how Mike talked to her last night.

But this was Mike. He was heartbroken, but he wouldn't just throw her out when she needed help.

Erin curled up in the recliner while the other four sat in a circle in front of the pillow fort, Eleven toying with Mike's super comm. White noise and small sounds reminiscent of a baby monitor kept coming from the electronic as El toyed with it.

"We keep losing the signal, but you hear it, right?" Mike asked, looking between Lucas and Dustin as Eleven worked.

"Yeah, I heard a baby." Lucas remarked, not really impressed.

"What?" Mike asked, confused on how Lucas didn't recognize the sounds they were hearing.

"You tapped into a baby monitor." Erin actually spoke from her balled up position on the recliner, but otherwise didn't move to look at them.

"Probably the Blackburns next door." Lucas offered, as they were the only ones on the street with a baby.

"Uh, did that sound like a baby to you?" Mike asked, surprised that not one of them recognized those sounds. "That was Will!"

"Mike..." Lucas rolled his eyes at how desperate he was to hold onto Will still being alive.

"You don't understand. He spoke last night. Words! He was singing that weird song he loves." Erin's head perked up from the recliner at the mention. "Even El heard him!"

"Oh, well, if the weirdo heard him, then I guess-"

"Are you sure you're on the right channel?" Dustin asked as Erin got up from the recliner and moved over onto the floor beside Eleven,

watching what Eleven did with the super comm closely.

"I don't think its about that. I think, somehow, she's channeling him." Mike tried to explain, not sure himself how she did it but hoping that maybe she could do it again.

The boys kept talking as Eleven continued trying with the super comm and Erin watched her.

"All I know is Will is alive. Will is alive and he's out there somewhere! All we have to do is find him." Mike assured the group as static continued crackling from the super comm.

Erin slowly reached out and tried to help Eleven, jerking back when the super comm crackled with life for a moment. More whimpering started to come through and Erin's eyes widened as she realized Dustin's comment about the noises Will made when he broke his finger was right.

"We need a stronger radio." Erin butted into their conversation without realizing they already came to the same conclusion already.

"Mr. Clarke's heathkit ham shack." Dustin offered, him and Mike smiling at each other because they knew that would be strong enough.

"It's at school. There's no way we're gonna get the weirdo in there without anyone noticing." Lucas reminded them, the smiles falling at knowing he had a point. "I mean, look at her."

The three boys looked to Eleven, who looked back in confusion to what they felt was wrong with the way she looked.

Erin rolled her eyes at the stupidity of boys before taking Eleven's hand and pulling her to her feet. "Give me some time." Erin began to lead Eleven towards the door out of the basement.

"Where are you going?" Mike called after them as she threw open the door.

"You find something for her hair and I'll handle the rest." Erin called back to him before they were gone.

The three boys exchanged a look of confusion about what Erin was going to do with Eleven before jumping up to go find something to help Eleven blend in.

---

"This is makeup." Erin explained to El as she held up a make up pallet she had been gifted but never once used. "Some girls use it to make themselves look prettier." Erin continued as she collected some blush on the brush to use for El's cheeks.

"Pretty?" El asked as she watched Erin purse her lips at the makeup as she called it.

"Yeah. I personally think I'm pretty with or without it. I'd say the same about you, but we need to make sure you blend in to the rest of the school." Erin said with a shrug before lifting the brush to El's cheeks and applying the blush.

"Me? Pretty?" El asked, staring back wide eyed at Erin for what she said.

Erin blinked at her for a moment, before smiling gently. "Sure, why wouldn't you be?" Erin asked as she continued working with the makeup.

Eleven gestured towards her shaven hair, and Erin's smile dropped into a frown.

"Ignore anyone that says you aren't. We're pretty inside and out." Erin assured her, rubbing a hand over her hair for emphasis. "What matters is how we feel about ourselves."

Eleven stared back at Erin as she continued applying the makeup to her cheeks, smiling at her kindness before allowing her to apply some sticky substance to her lips.

The boys barged into Erin's house half an hour later with clothes and a wig for Eleven to use to disguise herself. Erin didn't allow them into her bedroom where they were, just peeked at them through the crack in the door and took the wig that they offered before re-shutting the door.

"What do you think she's doing? I hope it's believable." Lucas muttered as they sat in the living room and waited.

"I'm sure it will be." Mike muttered, a bit nervous himself to see how the transformation would go. He wasn't sure if he was more nervous if it would work, or to see how Eleven would look now.

"Boys..." The three boys in the living room stood up as Erin peeked around the corner. "We would like you to meet, Eleanor." Erin introduced, before gesturing dramatically to Eleven to walk out into the living room.

All three boys gasped in awe as El walked out. She wore the shoulder length blonde wig they brought for her, and a white and blue knee length dress that fit her perfectly. She held a jean jacket on one arm and toed the carpet with white sneakers Erin also provided.

"Wow, she looks..." Dustin trailed off, but Mike finished the sentence for him.

"Pretty." Mike said breathlessly, unable to look away. El smiled at him, and he looked away before correcting himself. "Good... you look pretty good."

Erin smirked a little at how all three of the boys couldn't take their eyes of El now.

El walked past him to a curio cabinet that held a mirror, staring at her reflection and gasping softly at what she saw. "Pretty." El whispered as Mike and Erin appeared beside her in the mirrors reflection, Mike awkwardly nervous and Erin smiling encouragingly at El's acceptance of her work. "Good..." Eleven finished with what Mike had said.

Lucas and Dustin kept exchanging knowing smiles about Mike's obvious acceptance of El's appearance, before looking away when El looked back their way.

"Thank you." Eleven said to Erin with a smile still present, combing her fingers through the blonde wig. She didn't much care for it, but it helped her look pretty.

Erin grinned back and gave a bow.

"Since when do you know how to do girly stuff like make up and have dresses?" Lucas poked at Erin's hard work and earned a glare for it.

"Yeah, we've never once seen you wear either of those." Erin's glare shifted to Dustin now that he joined in with Lucas.

"You're both assholes." Erin grumbled before walking away, Lucas and Dustin snickering even after her bedroom door slammed.

With El now ready, the five hopped on their bikes to make their way to the school and get El to the Heathkit.

The ride was quiet, but El looked around in amazement at the town now that she was allowed to be out since she was all dressed up for it. Was this how everywhere outside of the bad place looked? Was there always so much movement, people and noise?

They rolled up to a large building with big yellow cars parked in the streets when the bikes all came to a stop.

"We're here." El looked back at Mike when he spoke, still so amazed by everything that she didn't want to stop.

They walked up to a set of doors and walked in to the building that the others referred to as their school. "Okay, remember, if anyone sees us, look sad." Mike reminded everyone as he walked with El at his side, who was looking around him and probably not paying attention to him.

El flinched when a loud voice suddenly rang out through the hallways. "It's alright, that's just the speakers. It's someone talking into a microphone, then their voice is projected to audio speakers throughout the school." Erin explained as El went to cover her ears against the announcements.

They turned a corner and walked up to a door that Mike smacked into when it didn't open at first try like it usually would. "Great, it's locked." Mike grumbled as he jiggled the doorknob a few times.



Lucas tried next to open it, to no avail. "Hey, do you think you can open it? With your powers?" Dustin asked El as Erin went next to try to force the door open when Lucas couldn't.

"Boys and girl?" All kids turned around to see Mr. Clarke come around the corner and stop in front of them.

"Hey..." Dustin greeted their favorite teacher quietly, the other four staring back as they got into character to make the adult believe they were sad.

"Assembly's about to start." Mr. Clarke reminded all of them as he looked between them all.

"We know. W-we're just... you know..." Mike trailed off stammering.

"Upset." Erin muttered quietly as she looked down and away from the teacher, not having any difficulty playing the part.

"Y-yeah. Definitely." Dustin stammered along with the others.

"We need some alone time." Mike tried to reason as he too looked down at the tiled floor.

"To... cry." Dustin stammered awkwardly again, and followed the others lead and looked down to stop ruining their chance of convincing Mr. Clarke.

"Yeah, listen. I get it. I do." Mr. Clarke assured them, frowning a little himself. "I know how hard this is, but let's just be there for Will, huh? And then..." Mr. Clarke pulled out the AV room keys from his pocket and tossed them to Mike. "The heathkit is all yours for the rest of the day. What do you say?" Mr. Clarke asked as all four of his students started to smile at his generosity.

Then his gaze turned to El, who's eyes widened when he looked down at her.

"I don't believe we've met. What's your name?" Mr. Clarke asked, smiling kindly down at her.

"Eleve-"

"Eleanor!" Mike and Erin both spoke at the same time over El's near give away.

"She's my cousin." Erin thought quick on an excuse to use to help El, nudging Mike in the ribs with an elbow for help.

"She's here for Will's funeral." Mike revealed as he put a hand on El's shoulder.

"Ah, well, welcome to Hawkins Middle, Eleanor. I wish you were here under better circumstances." Mr. Clarke said with a half smile, before becoming curious. "Where are you from exactly?"

El's eyes widened and all four of the students looked to her in horror of what she might say. "Bad place." El answered with a shake of her head.

"Sweden!" Dustin butted in to try to help.

"I'm told I have a lot of family there." Erin played along, nodding her head along to his excuse.

"She hates it there..." Dustin played it up by dropping his tone, sounding like he was talking about a war zone.

"Cold!" Lucas jumped in with them to help.

"Subzero." Dustin punctuated his word by pointing in the air. No one spoke for a moment as Mr. Clarke just watched them all with an almost suspicious look in his eyes, before nodding back at them.

"Shall we?" Mr. Clarke gestured towards the hallway that led them towards the auditorium.

The walk to the auditorium almost felt like a death march. They all wanted to get out of it and get back to the Heathkit to find Will. But they arrived, Dustin opening the doors with such a loud bang that it echoed throughout the entire room and every single person in there went silent and looked to them in the doorway.

All four students felt spotlighted, Dustin turning to run with a simple, "Abort!" Lucas stopped him and shoved him forward before they all

marched over to the only empty spot on the bleachers and sat down.

"Will Byers death is an unimaginable tragedy. Will was an exceptional student and a wonderful friend to all of us. It is impossible to express the hole his loss will leave in our community." All four of Will's friends just looked around uncomfortably as their Principal droned on.

Everyone in here was a faker. None of them knew Will. None of them probably even knew his name until he disappeared.

Near them on the bleachers, Troy and James mocked Will's supposed death, all five friends glaring at the two bullies. "Mouth breathers." Eleven whispered the word as she glared towards the two boys.

When the assembly ended, they all started to depart for the AV room. Except Mike, who started towards Troy and James with anger in his heart. "Hey. Hey! Hey, Troy!" Mike stopped right in front of them when they turned to him with mild amusement. "You think this is funny?" Mike questioned angrily, El standing at his side.

"What did you say, Wheeler?" Troy asked back, as James glared down at him.

A crowd began to form as words were exchanged, and the entire group minus Mike knew this wasn't going to end well.

"Besides, what's there to be sad about anyway? Will's in fairyland now, right? Flying around with all the other little fairies. All happy and gay!" Troy mocked their missing friend even more by acting like the fairy he claimed Will to be.

That was the last straw for two of the friends.

Mike and Erin both rushed forward and each pushed one of the boys to the ground roughly.

The two bullies looked back at them in fury before standing up. "Your dead, Wheeler and Bright Eyes. Dead!" Troy snarled before he and James charged.

They got to about a foot away from the two when they suddenly

stopped in their tracks, confusion etched across their faces.

Mike and Erin exchanged a confused look themselves before looking back at the bullies.

They noticed a trail of liquid begin to appear on each of their pant legs.

"Dude, Troy and James peed themselves!" Someone in the crowd shouted, before every kid that wasn't a part of the situation began laughing.

Even Mike and Erin chuckled a little at the still stuck in their run towards them bullies, before turning around to go back to their friends.

It was as they turned that they noticed Eleven with an intense stare on the bullies. She looked at them for a moment before wiping her nose and walking away.

When the principal noticed the commotion, the friends all ran for it before they could be caught.

Mike took a hold of El's wrist to lead her out of the auditorium and towards the AV club.

Erin ran beside them as the three of them each exchanged a look. Mike's eyes locked with Erin's after looking away from El, and they both grinned at one another.

They finally stood up to Troy and James. And their new friend helped them, too! Will will be proud when he hears about this!

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***Before I begin, I noticed with the last chapter that for some reason my edits and footnotes are either being changed or completely removed. I have no idea why, because I hit save every few minutes to make sure nothing gets possibly lost. An entire paragraph was removed from last chapters footnote, I had to manually go back and rewrite it much to my annoyance.***

***Please, if you notice something that seems out of place or notice a***

*sentence that looks like it's missing something, let me know. I spend enough time going sentence by sentence editing each chapter that this really annoys me that some of my stuff is being unpublished when I publish the chapters.*

*The kids, well three of them, finally stood up to the bullies! Woo! Plus look at that makeover for El, Mike couldn't take his eyes off her huh? Glad the friends managed to get over the last night and keep on trying to find Will.*

*Can I also just awww at the grieving moment at the chapters start for a moment too? I'm actually really having fun trying to find music of the right years to listen to for this.*

*Thanks as always for reading! For sticking around this long when I know how rough those first few chapters were! Probably gonna go back at some point and redo those, to be honest. But thank you so very much! I'm gonna go start the next chapter, see you then!*

## 7. The Flea and The Acrobat

The light fixture above the Heathkit buzzed obnoxiously as the five kids surrounded the radio, Eleven sitting at the desk as she looked down at the device. "She'll find him." Mike assured his friends as he began to tune the Heathkit for Eleven.

Eleven stared at the radio for a moment before placing her hands on the table and closing her eyes.

"She's doing it, she's finding him!" Mike said excitedly, looking to each of his friends with an excited smile.

"This is crazy." Dustin said as he watched the girl in front of them all.

"Calm down. She's just closed her eyes." Lucas reminded them while gesturing to Eleven.

Suddenly the lightbulb above their heads crackled before flicking out. "What the..."

"Holy..."

A sound of something being banged on began to play from the heathkit. Each bang got louder, and louder, and louder.

"What is that?"

The noise only continued to grow in sound level and started to come more frequently than the last.

"Mom?" Will's voice came through the Heathkit, and all four of his friends gasped quietly at finally hearing his voice.

The banging sound continued to get louder, coming more often as the seconds past.

"Mom... please... mom..."

"Will!"

"Will, we're here!"

"Will, it's us! Are you there?" The kids all yelled into the mic as they scrambled closer frantically, trying to reach their friend as Eleven continued channeling him.

"Can you hear us? We're here!"

"Will!"

"Hello? Mom?" Will's voice began to distort in the speakers of the heathkit.

"Why can't he hear us?" Lucas asked as he leaned over Eleven towards Mike with a frantic look in his eyes.

"I don't know!" Mike snapped back at him, trying to think of a way that they could talk to him and he would hear them as quick as he could.

"Mom! Mom!"

"Mom... Mom, it's coming!"

"What's coming?" Erin leaned over Mike's shoulder to be closer to the microphone. "Will! Will what's coming!" Erin nearly shouted into the microphone in hopes that he'd hear them.

"It's like home, but it's so dark..." Will's voice began to echo in the speakers as the boys all exchanged fearful looks at where the hell Will was. "It's so dark and empty. And it's cold!"

"Mom? Mom!" Growling began to come through the speakers, distant. "Mom, please!"

Erin reached forward, putting a hand over El's on the heathkit as she tried to figure out some way to reach Will when the growling got louder and louder.

Suddenly, sparks flew and the heathkit went up in flames. El opened her eyes in time to see the fire as all the other kids in the room jerked back in surprise and horror that the heathkit just blew up on them.

Dustin ran for a corner and came back with the fire extinguisher, putting out the fire as Eleven just stared while breathing heavily.

"El, are you okay?" Mike asked, noticing the trail of blood that ran down from her nose to her lip and the way she looked much paler. "Can you move?" She didn't answer or even respond, she just stared back at him.

Mike and Lucas lifted El up from the chair while Dustin reached down and lifted her by the legs, the boys carrying her out of the room while Erin ran behind them. The AV door slammed shut behind them.

They managed to find an empty cart in their retreat, laying El on it to get her out of the school as fast as possible while other students fled from the fire alarm going off.

---

Eleven laid on the couch in Mike's basement, exhausted. The others were sitting around as well, talking about what she wasn't even aware due to how drained she was.

Erin sat on the floor in front of the couch, occasionally looking back to check on her.

"What was Will saying?" Mike questioned the three as he sat on the other end of the couch from Eleven, trying his hardest to understand where Will was. "Like home... like home... But dark?" Mike stood up and began to pace the floor.

"And empty." Lucas reminded, at a loss himself for where the hell Will could be.

"Empty and cold. Wait, did he say cold?" Dustin asked, turning to Lucas to make sure he was right and not just imagining things because of the craziness when the fire started.

"Yes, he said cold." Erin answered for Lucas, Dustin looking back towards her with a small frown.

"It's like riddles in the dark." Dustin muttered, turning his eyes up to the ceiling before threading a hand through his curls that stuck out



from under his hat.

"Like home." Erin muttered, leaning her chin on a raised knee.

"Like his house?" Mike asked, turning to Lucas when he made a sound.

"Or maybe like Hawkins." Lucas offered, hopeful as he raised a finger in the air.

"Upside down." Eleven spoke up tiredly from the couch, all four kids looking towards her since she hadn't spoken at all since before she channeled Will.

"Upside down." Mike muttered, the pieces finally starting to click in his head. He walked over to the table where the upside down board of their game still laid. "When El showed us where Will was, she flipped the board over, remember?" Mike said as he flipped the board right side up before turning it over once again while the other four surrounded the table as well.

"Upside down." Erin said as the pieces began to click into place in her head as well.

"Dark. Empty." Mike repeated what Will said to them over the radio.

"Do either of you understand what he's talking about?" Lucas asked, looking to Dustin then Erin.

"When El took us to find Will, she took us to his house." Erin said as she leaned onto the table, keeping her eyes on Mike as he understood just like her now.

"Well what if he was there? What if we just couldn't see him? What if he was on the other side?" Mike asked, flipping the board right side up again. "What if... this is Hawkins..." Mike flipped the board upside down again. "And this is where Will is? The Upside Down." Mike explained, Dustin and Lucas starting to understand what Mike was telling them.

"Like the Vale of Shadows." Dustin surmised, but Lucas didn't look too convinced himself.

Erin ran over to one of the bookshelves and grabbed the old tattered book she was looking for, bringing it back to Dustin who opened it to read to them about the Vale of Shadows.

"A plane out of phase. A place of monsters. It is right next to you and you don't even see it." Dustin read aloud to the group.

"An alternate dimension." Erin whispered, leaning over the table while looking at the upside down board.

"But... how... how do we even get there?" Lucas stuttered, not sure if he should really believe this but this was the best they've got going so far to where Will might be.

"You cast Shadow Walk." Dustin answered, always the first to know any answers when it came to things of this topic.

"In real life, dummy." Lucas said with a flat glare at the curly haired know it all.

"We can't shadow walk." Erin muttered, before everyone's eyes suddenly followed a path towards the girl laying on the couch.

"But... maybe she can." Dustin said with a nod towards the exhausted super girl, who only looked back at them with tired eyes.

"Do you know how to get there? To the Upside Down?" Mike asked softly, knowing they've already asked a lot of El today alone. But they needed to go save their friend.

El slowly shook her head at him, Lucas sighing dramatically while Dustin looked back at the book on the table.

---

The kids that weren't staying in the Wheelers house went home a while later. Erin went back to her house, even though Dustin tried telling her that his Mom would really like for her to stay over at their house. At least until her parents got home.

Instead he was once again pushed through his door to go collect her. Mom's orders.

Instead of trying her window or going to the front door, this time he was smart and went around the back to the basement door that led outside. It was surprisingly unlocked when he tried it too.

Which was how they were now laid down on opposite sides of one of the couches playing Uno together. Even though they both knew it would piss off Dustin's mom and that they had a funeral to go to tomorrow.

A funeral for their best friend who wasn't even dead.

"Skip." Dustin earned a glare as he played the card, smiling deviously as he placed down another. "Skip. Skip. Skip."

"Screw you!" Erin snapped at him after his fifth Skip card was played. This was why she didn't like playing card games with him, he always saves up these damaging cards to use on her!

Dustin just laughed at her before playing a neutral card, letting her have her turn back finally.

Silence fell on them once again as they continued, Dustin occasionally looking up from his hand at the girl across from him. "Umm..."

"Yes?" Erin asked as she looked over the top of her cards at him.

"This Vale of shadows..." Dustin furrowed his eyebrows as he placed down another card. "You think El's from that place? The Upside Down? Or even been there if she's not?" Dustin asked before sitting up.

"If she had been, don't you think she'd know how to get there?" Erin asked, and Dustin felt stupid for a moment for not thinking of that.

"Good point..."

"I mean, I'm sure she might have seen it. Who knows what that thing is she does. Look at some of these movies they got about how some people claim their psychic and can see things in their heads like ghosts or demons. Maybe it's like that." Erin tried to reason upon seeing how downcast Dustin had become.

"True..." Dustin's mood lifted again, and Erin smiled at how he rebounded so easily. The smile fell though when he yet again skipped her.

"You asshole!" Dustin burst into laughter as she reached for the pillows stacked on the back of the couch and threw one at him.

Mrs. Henderson doesn't know why she sent her son over there. She should have known he would get distracted and they wouldn't come back to the house willingly.

The front door was unlocked, which she wasn't too happy about either considering the recent tragedy, but she made her way towards the basement where she could plainly hear laughter.

"Dustin!" Mrs. Henderson called down to her son, but there was no answer.

Making her way down the stairs, she almost felt bad for wanting to bring them back to the safety of her own house.

Playing cards littered the floor, and pillows were throw here and there. It looked like a tornado hit almost with the chaos.

But her son was hiding behind one moved couch, and Erin was behind another and they kept tossing things back and forth at each other while laughing.

Mrs. Henderson covered her mouth at how happy they were making each other when they no doubt were in unimaginable pain from the loss of Will. They were so good for each other, she was so happy that Erin lived across the street from them so she could help her Dusty.

"Take this!" Both kids shouted at the same time as they jumped over the couches and whipped nerf balls at one another.

"Shit!"

"Kids!"

---

"Why do you two look like you rushed to get dressed?" Mike asked as

he walked over to Dustin and Erin who were being fretted over by Mrs. Henderson.

"We overslept." Dustin answered as his Mom tried choking him yet again, about ready to tear this damn tie off.

"You overslept on the day of Will's funeral?" Lucas walked over to them with his hands stuck in his nice jacket pockets.

"Sweetie, stop fidgeting." Mrs. Henderson patted Erin on the head as she finally fixed up her hair, the shoulder length finally tamed back with a headband and some pins.

Erin, when Mrs. Henderson stopped looking her way, glared openly at nothing in particular for the fact that she was not only attending her best friends funeral, who wasn't dead by the way, but now dressed up like some porcelain doll.

When the funeral began, the four were all stood together around Will's grave as the pastor spoke. Mike, Lucas and Erin were playing the part, sad and empty gazes on the coffin that supposedly held Will's body.

Dustin, however, kept looking around at all the people that turned out. A small smile turned his lips up when he saw who one of the girls was that was crying, nudging Lucas with an elbow. "Just wait till we tell Will that Jennifer Hayes was crying at his funeral." Dustin mused as Mike and Erin looked his way as well.

Mrs. Wheeler, who was standing behind Mike, immediately shushed Dustin. He went back to acting sad with the others.

The friends were one of the first to throw flowers on Will's coffin, moving off to the side once done and just watching. "Isn't that Will's dad?" Erin asked as she jabbed a thumb in the direction of the man who stood beside Mrs. Byers after hugging Mike's mom.

"Yeah, surprise surprise he actually showed up." Mike grumbled quietly, Lucas humming his agreement to what Mike had said.

The reception after the funeral was almost worst than the funeral itself. Everyone stuck together in one building eating and mingling

and always checking on them to try to help or ask if they're going to be okay.

Why is it always "How are you doing?" "Is there anything I can do to help you?" Just the same phrases that don't actually help someone who's grieving?

Finally, an adult who they all liked was in sight though. The kids all walking over to Mr. Clarke as they spotted him. "Mr. Clarke?" Mike called his name to get his attention.

"Oh, hey there. How you kids holding up?" Mr. Clarke asked with a sympathetic smile down at the four. Oh look, even he asks the same thing. How are you?

"We're...in...mourning." Lucas muttered and looked down to resist the urge to roll his eyes at being asked that for what felt like the millionth time today.

"Man, these aren't real Nilla Wafers." The three kids looked at Dustin for his out there comment, who spoke with his mouth half full and still held another cookie.

"We were wondering if you had time to talk?" Mike asked, ignoring Dustin's randomness for the time being.

"We have some questions." Erin said as she looked up at their teacher with hopeful eyes.

"A lot of questions." Mike continued for her.

Mr. Clarke sat down at a table with them, a few plates of food littering the table and Dustin enjoying himself while Lucas and Erin picked at the food. "So, you know how in Cosmos, Carl Sagan talks about other dimensions?" Mike asked, sitting right beside their wise teacher. "Like, beyond our world?"

"Yeah, sure. Theoretically." Mr. Clarke answered him, actually a bit proud that the kids were still so curious even considering the current tragedy they're suffering from.

"Right, theoretically." Erin answered before taking a bite of one of the

fake Nilla wafers.

"So, theoretically, how do we travel there?" Lucas asked, Mr. Clarke looking between each of them.

"You guys have been thinking about Hugh Everett's Many-Worlds interpretation, haven't you?" Mr. Clarke asked with an amused smile at the kids surrounding him. When the four just exchanged looks of confusion with one another, he continued. "Well, basically, there are parallel universes. Just like our world, but just infinite variations of it. Which means there's a world out there where none of this tragic stuff ever happened." Mr. Clarke explained, frowning at his last words about there being a world where a bright young mind such as Will Byers wasn't taken too early.

"Yeah, that's not what we're talking about." Lucas said with a shake of his head.

"Oh?"

"We were thinking of more of an evil dimension." Dustin explained, not sure about what Mr. Clarke was talking about but now curious enough about it that he'll probably go look into it at some later date.

"Like the Vale of Shadows." Erin offered, knowing their teacher enjoyed the lore of Dungeons and Dragons so he'd understand the reference.

"An echo of the Material Plane, where necrotic and shadow magic-" Mike cut Mr. Clarke off mid sentence.

"Yeah, exactly. If that did exist, a place like the Vale of Shadows, how would we travel there?" Mike asked, hoping they're right and Mr. Clarke has an idea.

"Theoretically, of course."

"Well..." Mr. Clarke began with a deep sigh as he thought on his answer. He then took one of the plates from the table and a pen from his pocket. "Picture... an acrobat... standing on a tightrope." Mr. Clarke said as he drew a stick figure atop a rope on the plate. "Now, the tightrope is our dimension. And our dimension has rules. You can

move forwards, or backwards." Mr. Clarke drew arrows pointing in those directions on the plate.

"But, what if... right next to our acrobat, there is a flea?" Mr. Clarke drew a flea on the plate beside the stick figure. "Now, the flea can also travel back and forth, just like the acrobat. Right?" Mr. Clarke asked, looking to each of them for their answer.

"Right."

"Here's where things get really interesting." Mr. Clarke said with a smile. "The flea can also travel this way... along the side of the rope." Mr. Clarke revealed while drawing the arrows on the sides of the rope. "He can even go... underneath the rope."

"Upside down." All four students said at the same time as they understood what Mr. Clarke was explaining to them.

"Exactly."

"But, we're not the flea, we're the acrobat." Mike clarified, unsure how this would help them.

"In this metaphor, yes, we're the acrobat." Mr. Clarke agreed before looking to the others.

"So we can't go upside down?" Erin asked, Lucas on the same thought process as her.

"No." Mr. Clarke answered her.

"Well, is there any way for the acrobat to get to the Upside Down?" Dustin asked, not willing to give up just yet just cause they weren't the flea.

"Well... you'd have to create a massive amount of energy. More than humans are currently capable of creating, mind you, to open up some kind of tear in time and space, and then..." Mr. Clarke folded the paper plate in half, before stabbing his pen through it with a loud pop that made Lucas jump. "You create a doorway." Mr. Clarke finished as all four of his students looked at the puncture hole in the plate.



"Like a gate?" Dustin asked, poking a finger towards the plate.

"Sure, like a gate." Mr. Clarke agreed to his terminology. "But again, this is all-"

"Theoretical."

"But... but what if this gate already existed?" Mike asked carefully, hoping they aren't making Mr. Clarke suspicious of them.

"Well, if it did, I... I think we'd know. It would disrupt gravity, the magnetic field, our environment." Mr. Clarke explained further for his curious pupils. "Heck, it might even swallow us up whole. Science is neat. But I'm afraid it's not very forgiving." Mr. Clarke finished with a small frown at how science can be brutal when it wants.

The four students in front of him looked to one another once again, conflicted over the information he gave them.

After the reception, the friends went back to Mike's basement where Mike explain to El what they learned from Mr. Clarke. "Otherwise, how'd Will get there, right?"

"Right." Eleven answered, a little startled still from the loud sound of him stabbing his pencil through the sheet in front of her.

"What we want to know is, do you know where the gate is?" Mike asked as Dustin wandered around nearby with a compass, making Erin do it with him even though she didn't understand why they were doing it.

Eleven shook her head in response to Mike's question.

"Then how do you know about the Upside Down?" Lucas asked, not believing her.

Dustin was spinning around in one spot with his compass when the other three finally noticed them. "What are you two doing?" Mike called over to the two walking around with compasses.

Erin shrugged, not sure herself, while Dustin didn't seem to hear him as he kept pacing about. Mike and Lucas continued calling his name

until Erin walked over to him and tapped him on the shoulder. "I... I need to see your compasses. Here, let me see yours." Dustin snatched the one Erin had been holding.

"What?" Mike asked, unsure how this had anything to do with the current discussion.

"Your compasses. All of your compasses, right now!" Dustin firmly said, Mike and Lucas exchanging confused glances before getting up to go grab their compasses for him.

Once there was about eight compasses on the table, Mike turned to Dustin for an answer. "What's exciting about this?"

"Well, they're all facing north, right?" Dustin asked, actually proud of himself for what he's discovered.

"Yeah, and?" Erin asked as she looked down at all the compasses.

"Well, that's not true north." Dustin said while poking one of the compasses on the table.

"What do you mean?" Mike asked, leaning forward with his hands on the table.

"I mean exactly what I just said. That's not true north." Dustin said while pointing at the compasses for emphasis. "Are you guys seriously this dense?" Which only earned a shrug from Lucas and no reaction from the other two. "The sun rises in the east, and it sets in the west. Right?" Dustin asked as he motioned in both directions. Yet again, he earned minimal responses. "Which means that's true north." Dustin said while pointing north to clarify.

"So you're saying that all of these compasses are broken?" Erin asked, Dustin sighing as he leaned against the table and wondered why none of them were as smart as himself.

"You were supposed to be the smart one like me. Do you understand how a compass works?" Dustin asked, ignoring the glare he got for his first comment. "Do you see a battery pack on this?" Dustin held up one of the compasses for each of them to see.

"No." Mike answered and Dustin put the compass back down.

"No, you don't. Because it doesn't need one. The needle is naturally drawn to the Earth's magnetic North Pole." Dustin explained for his three friends around him.

"So what's wrong with them?" Lucas asked as he stuffed his hands in his pockets.

"Well, that's what I couldn't figure out, but then I remembered. You can change the direction of a compass with a magnet." Dustin reminded, smiling when he saw Erin immediately perk up. "You got it, don't you?" Dustin asked, grinning when Erin nodded. "I knew you were smart."

"The presence of a more powerful magnetic field can deflect the needles to their power." Erin butted in on Dustin's lecturing hour.

"Mr. Clarke said the gate would have so much power-"

"It could disrupt the electromagnetic field." Mike interrupted Dustin as he finally understood. They could use their compasses to find the gate, because they were naturally drawn to the gate's electromagnetic field!

"So if we follow the compasses north-"

"They should lead us right to that gate." Erin interrupted Lucas this time, snatching her compass off the table and grinning at it. Finally! They're going to go get Will!

Eleven looked between the four friends worriedly. She knew how dangerous their plan was, they had no idea where that gate was. How it was opened, how dangerous the bad men are who are guarding it.

"Come on, let's go look for it then." Lucas said as he grabbed his compasses from the table.

"We kind of can't go out like this." Mike reminded, tugging at his nice clothes for emphasis.

"Right... Let's all get changed and meet back here!" Erin took off for

the door without another word.

Lucas snorted at her urgency. "Gonna miss her when she's back with Will, aren't you?" Lucas jabbed an elbow in Dustin's ribs teasingly as he walked past the curly haired genius.

"Huh? What're you talking about?" He's a genius when it comes to science, maybe.

"Come on, let's go get changed. We'll be back in a little bit, Mike." Lucas said before dragging Dustin out the door with him.

It was time to go find that gate and bring Will home.

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*It's a little hard to believe that we're already seven chapters in at this point. I honestly thought that I would take a bit longer to write this story out, but I just can't seem to help myself. I'm watching the show on my other monitor while writing, so it helps keep me focused!*

*The party had a lot of learning to do this chapter, huh? And they weren't even in class for it. They're so lucky to have a teacher like Mr. Clarke. Always willing to help. Wish my school had teachers like that back when I was there.*

*Thanks you as always for reading! I'm so happy to see that the amount of views keeps going up the more chapters come out. It makes it so much more fun to write this. I will see you guys next chapter!*

## 8. Fight or Flight

The five friends walked along the train tracks with their compasses all out in front of them, following the needles towards the gate. They'd been walking for a while now, and still there was no sign of what they were searching for.

Not that they knew what to expect. What was this gate even going to look like to begin with?

Mike walked at the back with Eleven beside him, Dustin and Lucas at the head and Erin in the middle of their line. "How much farther?" Lucas asked their compass genius.

"I don't know. These things only tell direction, not distance." Dustin reminded while not taking his eyes off the compass in his hand. "You really need to learn more about compasses."

"I'm just saying. How do we know when we get to the gate even?" Lucas asked, looking back at the weirdo in the back who walked with his best friend.

"Uh, I think a portal to another dimension is gonna be pretty obvious." Dustin mocked his oblivious friend, who just glared at him for mocking him when he was being serious.

Lucas looked back again at the two behind him as Eleven ran a sleeve under her nose.

"Maybe some of the characteristics of the Upside Down will be spreading through near the portal. You know, like Will said. It's dark, it's like home. It's cold, maybe it'll be necrotic like the actual Vale of Shadows." Erin offered her idea of what they might find when they reach the gate.

"Great, we're looking for a cold spot in the middle of November." Lucas grumbled before turning back around to Dustin. "Do you think she's acting weird?" Lucas asked, nodding back behind them.

"By telling us what she was thinking the portal might look like?"

"No idiot, the weirdo."

Dustin looked back at Eleven behind them before back at Lucas with an incredulous turn of his lips. "You're asking if the weirdo is acting weird?" Dustin asked to make sure he just heard the overly critical friend beside him right.

"I mean, weirder than normal?" Lucas clarified before turning to look back at Eleven once more.

Erin cocked an eyebrow at him, since he had to look past her to see El.

"I don't know. Who cares?" Dustin asked in response, not seeing how this mattered right now. Lucas already thinks she's weird enough, what does it matter if she's being weirder?

"Mike, turn back." Eleven tried to warn Mike to get the others to turn around. To not go to the bad place, or even worse to the Upside Down. She wanted them to stay safe. They were in danger right now, they'd be even more if they continued.

"What? Why?" Mike asked, still continuing to walk and watch the compass.

Eleven frowned, thinking of an excuse. "I'm tired." Eleven attempted with that simple phrase.

"Look, I'm sure we're almost there. Just hold on a little longer, okay?" Mike asked, looking up from the compass to smile at her in hopes she could hold out just a little longer. They were so close, they can't stop now.

Eleven frowned as Mike walked ahead of her for a moment, looking back behind them where they would be much safer to go than the way they were. Sighing, she continued to follow as a drop of blood fell from her nose and created a path down to her lip.

The five continued walking until they reached the junkyard. Everyone was tired, the sun was on it's decline now as proof that they've been walking for way too long. "Oh, no." Dustin interrupted the silence that had been the group for most of the walk.

"Oh, no' What's, 'oh, no'?" Lucas asked as he stood behind Dustin, Erin coming to join him.

"We're headed back home." Dustin revealed, turning around to face the others would a look of disbelief.

"What?"

"Are you sure?"

"We just walked in a circle for hours?"

"Yeah, I'm sure. Setting sun, right there. We looped right back around from where we started." Dustin explained as he pointed up at the sun in the sky.

"And you're just realizing this now?" Lucas questioned, throwing his arms out around him in frustration. All this time they've been walking for nothing!

"Why is this all on me?" Dustin questioned, not liking the attitude he was getting.

"Because you're the compass genius!" Lucas snapped back as Mike and Erin walked up to stand between the two.

"We followed the compasses, though." Erin reminded, holding up her compass to check it.

"What do yours say?" Dustin asked, waving a hand towards Lucas and Mike.

"North." Both Lucas and Mike answered the same thing the other two had on their compasses.

"Makes no damn sense." Dustin muttered, looking down at his compass for a moment in confusion.

"Maybe the gate moved." Mike offered after sighing at the current situation.

"I don't think a gate that breaches the threshold of our world and the

Upside Down can just move." Erin reasoned, not knowing anything about this other dimension but if it needed a lot of power just to open, it probably needs even more if it were to be moved.

"No, she's right. It's gotta be something else." Dustin agreed with Erin's reasoning as he looked around where they were to figure out if something was here that drew them to the junkyard. "I think something else is screwing with the compasses."

"Maybe it's something here." Mike offered, waving a hand in the direction of all the scrap, trash and cars around them in the junkyard.

"No, it has to be like a super magnet." Dustin reminded as Lucas turned away from them and towards the only member of their group not saying a word.

Eleven was stood off to the side, silent and watching.

"It's not a magnet. It's her! She's been acting weirder than normal. If she can slam doors and make bullies piss themselves, she can definitely screw up a compass." Lucas accused as he jabbed a finger in the direction of the girl he didn't trust.

"Lucas, just leave her alone already." Erin growled, tired of his unfounded dislike of Eleven.

"Why would she even do that?" Mike asked, also coming to El's aid.

"Because she's trying to sabotage our mission. Because she's a traitor!" Lucas snapped, getting angrier and angrier as he looked towards the freak. He started to walk towards her.

"Lucas, what are you doing?" Mike questioned, following after him with Erin to make sure he didn't do anything to El.

Lucas stopped right in front of the telekinetic girl. "You did it, didn't you?" Lucas demanded, wanting to hear her admit to what she's done. "You don't want us to reach the gate. You don't want us to find Will." Lucas said as he glared at her, and all she did was stare back at him flatly.

"Leave her alone!"



"Admit it." Lucas demanded one more time for El to answer to what she's done.

"No."

"Admit it!" Lucas snapped and grabbed her by the wrist.

"Let go of her!" His hand was smacked away not a second after lifting her arm, Erin standing at El's side with her angry blue eyes trained on Lucas.

But Lucas saw what he expected to see on El's sleeve. "Fresh blood. I knew it." Lucas growled, turning to Mike when Mike yelled at him to stop. "I saw her wiping her nose on the tracks! She was using her powers!" Lucas revealed, having all the proof that he needed now to know Eleven was at fault.

"Bull! That's old blood. Right, El?" Mike asked, turning to El for her to confirm with them that the blood was old. El looked back at him with an apologetic glint in her eyes, her demeanor cracking now that Mike was the one asking her. "Right, El?" Mike asked one more time, not wanting to believe that she did this.

El was on the verge of crying as all four friends turned their gazes on them. "It's... not..." El stuttered quietly. "It's not safe." El admitted, wishing they could just understand the danger they were heading towards.

"What did I tell you? She's been playing us from the beginning!" Lucas barked after a moment to let El's words sink in passed.

"That's not true. She helped us find Will!" Mike argued, the two standing face to face with Lucas infuriated and Mike just trying to find a reason why El would do this to them.

"Find Will? Find Will?! Where is he, then? Huh? I don't see him!" Lucas said as he spun around with his arms up in the air to show Will was not found.

"You know what he means." Erin jumped in to Mike's defense, standing beside him now as Lucas glared at her now too.

"No, I actually don't. Just think about it, you guys. She could've just told us where the Upside Down was right away, but she didn't. She just made us run around like headless chickens." Lucas snarled as he walked back over to the two until he was right back in their faces.

"All right, calm down!" Dustin got between the three, putting a hand on Lucas and Mike's chest to push them back away from one another.

"No!" Lucas shoved him away roughly. "She used us, all of us! She helped just enough so she could get what she wants. Food and a bed. She's like a stray dog." Lucas continued to insult Eleven, who just stood off to the side helpless to fix the situation.

"Screw you, Lucas!" Mike snapped at him finally when he started spitting insults about Eleven that went too far.

"No! Screw you, both of you! You're both blind... You're blind because you like that a girl's not grossed out by you, and you're blind because you think she'll finally bring your precious Will back to you!" Lucas snapped at Mike, and Erin who hadn't even said anything to him but stood too close to the war zone. "Wake up, both of you wake the hell up!" Lucas yelled in Mike's face now, tired of all of this. "She knows where Will is, and now she's just letting him die in the Upside Down."

"SHUT UP!"

"For all we know, it's her fault."

"LUCAS SHUT UP!"

"We're looking for some stupid monster... but did either of you ever stop to think that maybe she's the monster?" Lucas pushed both Mike and Erin by the shoulder mid sentence.

Eleven gasped as the four kids looked at her.

"SHUT UP LUCAS!" Erin finally erupted, red in the face and blue eyes aflame with rage with his unjust discrimination on El. "YOU DO NOTHING BUT PICK ON HER AND CLAIM SHE'S A FREAK! SHUT YOUR DAMN MOUTH!"

"You shut up!" Lucas snapped back and got in her face now. "Imagine how Will's gonna feel if we ever see him again. Not even a week he's gone, you grieve one day and turn Dustin into your new Will! Then you go and make this freak into your new best friend?! Some friend you are to him!" Lucas roared back at Erin, and her anger fractured painfully due to how much what he said just hurt her.

"Leave her alone!"

"I said shut up!" Mike threw himself at Lucas, the two starting to throw punches as they tumbled to the ground.

"Stop!" Eleven yelled, rushing forward to try to stop the situation before it got worse.

"Knock it off, you idiots!" Dustin ran forward as well to try to stop them, but didn't otherwise intervene since they were rolling around on the ground throwing fists.

"Stop it!"

"Mike, get off!"

"Stop it!" Eleven yelled louder when Lucas pinned Mike down to the ground.

Eleven screamed, and Lucas suddenly went flying off of Mike. He flew at least ten feet before sliding across the ground and slamming into a metal pane.

"Jesus!" Dustin ran for Lucas as Mike scrambled to his feet and ran for him as well.

"Lucas! Lucas! Lucas, are you alright?" Mike asked, but their friend was unconscious on the ground where he landed.

"Lucas, come on!" Dustin and Mike both tried shaking him to get him to wake up.

"Lucas, wake up! Lucas."

"Come on, Lucas!"

"Why would you do that?!" Mike turned away from his unconscious friend to the telekinetic girl that threw his friend across the junkyard like that.

El just stared back at him in horror, both because Mike was upset when all she was trying to do was help, and because she might have just seriously hurt their friend.

"What's wrong with you? What is wrong with you!"

El began to cry, blood running down from her nose to her lip as she watched the two boys try desperately to wake Lucas up.

"Come on man, wake up!"

"Lucas... Lucas, come on!"

Lucas began to stir, lifting his head from the dirt and blinking a few times. Both Mike and Dustin let out relieved sighs as Lucas began to sit up more.

"Lucas. Lucas, are you okay?" Mike asked as Lucas sat up fully and put his back to the metal pane he had been thrown against.

"Lucas... Lucas, how many fingers am I holding up?" Dustin asked as he presented three extended fingers in front of Lucas's eyes to check to make sure he was okay. "Lucas, how many fingers?" Dustin repeated when Lucas didn't answer and instead raised a hand to his head.

"Let me see your head." Mike muttered, leaning forward to check to make sure he didn't crack his head when he was thrown.

"Get off of me!" Lucas finally spoke as he roughly smacked Mike's hand away from him.

"Lucas... Lucas, let me see." Mike tried to reason with his friend who stood up in front of them.

"Get off of me!" Lucas repeated the same phrase and smacked Mike's hand away when he tried to touch him again, stalking past him.

"Lucas, come on." Mike tried to run after their injured friend, but Dustin stopped him.

"Let him go." Dustin warned, knowing Lucas needed time to cool down. "Man, let him go."

Mike sighed, giving in to let Lucas have his space. He turned to look at the two girls, before realizing something. "Where's Erin and El?" Mike asked, Dustin whipping around to also see that the girls were gone.

"El!"

"Erin!"

"Erin!"

"Eleven!"

---

*"Why are we making this?" Will tossed a plank to Erin, who caught it and placed it down on the structure she was making with his help.*

*"Because we can't have a Mirkwood and not have a house from which the elves rule." Erin answered him like it was the simplest thing in the world.*

*"But what about Castle Byers?" Will asked, pouting his bottom lip out as he sat down beside Erin while she tied off some sticks to the structure she had designed.*

*"Castle Byers is your realm, oh Will the Wise. But the Woodland Realm is mine. What if you want some alone time, and I want some alone time? We have two different places to go to." Erin reasoned as she looked up from her hard work.*

*"You don't actually plan to stay out here, right? It's a little creepy..." Will trailed off to glance off in the direction of where the quarry was. He didn't like being so close to it.*

*"Maybe some day. I'll go home at night, I swear." Erin promised him with a hand over her chest and the other up in the air.*

*Will smiled, before walking over to their pile of supplies to grab more twine.*

*It was rare these days that the two of them got to be alone. But every time they are, it's always a lot of fun. Well, when they're not hauling a bunch of things off into the woods.*

*Erin was in the middle of digging out an entrance to the shabby little hut she had built with him when he walked over and sat down beside her. "Promise we'll always go to each other if something's wrong?" Will asked, twiddling his thumbs against the ball of twine.*

*Erin looked up from her work at his words. "Of course! You've always been there for me since I first got here, we're best friends till the end." Erin reminded him with a big grin that made her eyes seem even brighter than they already were.*

*Will grinned right back at her. "Do the others get to know about the Woodland Realm?" Will asked, nodding back at the structure made of planks, sticks, and who's even keeping track at this point.*

*"Maybe some day. Right now, it's our secret. We can come here together to just get away. Vacation in Mirkwood!" Erin chimed loudly, Will laughing at how happy and excited she was about their new creation.*

*They were the best of friends. Nothing was ever going to change that.*

---

Mike and Dustin both sat in Mike's basement, a bundle of nerves over where the hell their friends could possibly be.

Mike was upset because Eleven didn't come back last night. He came to the basement that morning in hopes of seeing her sleeping in the pillow fort, but she wasn't there. In anger, he kicked the fort down because he was so frustrated over yesterday and worried because she didn't come back.

But he was even more upset when Dustin came banging on the basement door soon after with the news that Erin never came back home last night either. She didn't have anywhere else to go, that they knew of. So where the hell could she be now?

Dustin's cap laid on his lap as he ran his fingers through his hair, unsure of what to do. He knew the basic about what needed to be done, but he didn't know how to find Erin.

He went to her house last night after the fight. He expected to see her on the couch in the basement like the last few nights. But the house was dark, empty. He checked her room to see if she took anything that could give him clues about where she was, but everything was still there.

So where the hell was Erin?

"I just... I can't believe neither of them came back last night." Mike muttered from where he sat on the couch, Dustin opposite from him on a chair.

"They've gotta be close. Maybe they're together." Dustin tried to reason in his head, hoping that the two were together. Erin would no doubt be a hell of a lot safer with Eleven and her abilities.

"She said it wasn't safe." Mike reminded him as he stood from the couch and began to pace the floor. "She just messed up the compasses because she wanted to protect us. She didn't betray us." Mike reasoned while walking, not willing to believe that El betrayed them. "But... why did Erin run off?"

Neither of them could figure out when the exact moment was that Erin left. They knew El stayed at least until Lucas was conscious again. But come to think of it, Erin said nothing during the whole brawl between Mike and Lucas.

So how long had she been gone and they didn't notice?

Each of them had a thought at the same time. "Will. It's because of what Lucas said to her about Will!" Mike voiced the thought first, turning to Dustin with fresh anger at their friend.

"Goddammit. Why's he gotta be such an asshole sometimes? He knew what would hurt her most, Will's her closest friend." Dustin muttered, pulling his cap back on before seeing a thoughtful look take his other friend's face over. "What?"

"The two of them had somewhere in Mirkwood that they ran off to. I only knew about it because Will's mom told me one time I went to get him that he was out at the Woodland Realm with Erin for the day." Mike revealed, having completely forgotten about it before since neither Will nor Erin ever invited them to go see their place in the woods.

"The Woodland Realm? Like in the Hobbit? Don't tell me the two of them slept out in the woods all night." Dustin got up from his chair and reached up to pull at his curls again.

"They wouldn't be out there if I hadn't yelled at El. They wouldn't be out there if it wasn't for Lucas." Mike grumbled while continuing to pace.

"It wasn't your fault you yelled at Eleven, and it wasn't Lucas's fault either." Dustin corrected Mike, who immediately turned to him.

"It wasn't his fault?" Mike questioned, surprised that Dustin was saying this when Lucas instigated that whole situation yesterday.

"No."

"So you're saying he wasn't way out of line?" Mike asked, taking a step closer to Dustin.

"Totally, but all of you were!" Dustin answered, waving his arms towards Mike.

"What?! Oh, give me a break!"

"No, Mike, you give me a break!" Dustin said as he stuck a finger out towards his friend. "All four of you were being a bunch of little assholes! I was the only reasonable one. The bottom line is, Lucas pushed Erin first but you pushed Lucas first." Dustin explained, knowing the rules better than any of them. "You know the rule. You draw first blood..."

"No! No way! I'm not shaking his hand." Mike argued, folding his arms in defiance to their rules.

"You're shaking his hand!"



"No, I'm not!"

"This isn't a discussion. This is the rule of law. Obey or be banished from the party. Do you want to be banished?" Dustin asked, folding his arms over his own chest when Mike stayed defiant for a moment.

"No."

"Good." Dustin turned around to walk over to their things.

"Where are we going?" Mike asked as he watched Dustin pull on his jacket.

"Where do you think, we're gonna go get Lucas. Then we're gonna go find Erin and Eleven." Dustin answered, tossing Mike his jacket and bag before walking past him for the door.

---

Erin perked up from her bed of blankets, pillows and the stray leaves that would blow into the shelter when she heard footsteps outside.

Erin flipped over onto her stomach and crawled towards the burrowed entrance, grabbing a knife along the way as the steps silenced.

Erin waited, listening carefully because from the distance of those steps she had no doubt they were outside her Woodland Realm.

When she started to hear the leaves in the burrow crunching, she shuffled over quick and put her back to the wall to wait.

When the shaven head of her friend peeked out of the entrance, she let out a breath. "El, you need to announce yourself. I thought you were an animal!" Erin said as she let the knife clatter to the ground.

"Sorry." El said simply before pulling herself fully inside. Erin cocked an eyebrow when she watched El pull in a bunch of boxes of Eggos.

"Where did you get those?" Erin asked, knowing El didn't have money when she left earlier in the morning.

"Mouth breathers." El said simply, and Erin decided that this was

better an answer than asking if the food was stolen. Didn't matter anyways, El was basically an alien to everyone else in this town.

El opened one of the boxes and handed it to her. Erin sent her a smile, despite the pain the two of them were still in from yesterday.

Erin had run off after what Lucas said. She regretted it, because she remembered soon after how worried the boys got last time. But El found her soon after.

No one else has ever come to the Woodland Realm other than herself and Will, but now El knew of it as well.

It was their escape from the boys. From that asshole Lucas who didn't understand how much she really missed Will, and that other asshole Mike who yelled at El when all she was doing was trying to protect them.

"Never tried these when they weren't warmed up first." Erin mused as Eleven ate her own like she hadn't eaten in weeks.

Eleven just hummed in response to her but continued eating.

Erin was a little surprised by how she was able to relax so easily around El. It was like that feeling when you're with an old friend, you're calm and just enjoying the time together. Comfortable.

"El! Erin!" The two girls perked their heads up as a voice echoed throughout the woods.

Erin and Eleven each exchanged a look, swallowing their food harder when they knew just who that was calling for them.

"Don't go out to them. We can go out when we're ready." Erin offered when she saw the look on El's face. How she looked so sad from hearing Mike's voice.

The calling of their names continued for a little longer before going quiet.

"They must have gotten out of echo range." Erin mused, taking another bite of the stolen Eggo El gave to her.

"Run!" Both girls spat their food out by habit when they heard the shout in the distance.

"You're dead, Wheeler!"

"Move, Mike! Run, come on!"

Erin and El both shot for the exit of the shelter, neither of them wanting to hide anymore. Mike and Dustin were in trouble.

That was Troy's voice in the midst of Dustin yelling to Mike. They were in deep shit now!

---

*And now I have as much room as I want to write out next chapter because I ended this on a cliff hanger. Yeah, I know, I suck. I have a love hate relationship with cliff hangers myself. I love giving them to readers, but I hate them being used on myself. Y'all will find out what happens though, don't worry!*

*Ooh though, that fight got bad didn't it? Probably not as bad as the fight Jonathan and Steve got in, but we didn't get to see that sadly. If it's not obvious by now, if I neglect to include certain scenes from the chapters it means they're basically just the same as they were in the show. So basically if you don't see it here, just refer back to the episode.*

*Some things were said this chapter though. We're gonna have to wait to find out how Lucas and Erin move past what he said. Will's her best friend, after all. I mean, look at the two of them in the Woodlands. How can you build something together and not be best friends after?*

*Thank you all so much for reading! I'm so happy to see the amount of views this is getting the further along it comes. On Fanfict alone this story has gotten over 400 views already, so happy! I'm gonna go start the next chapter because I'm actually very excited to write the Quarry scene, so I'll see y'all then!*

## 9. Fight

Mike and Dustin ran for their lives. They ran until they reached the quarry, Dustin getting a cramp and beginning to slow down. As they came around a bend, they were met by the sight of James running at them from the other direction. "Shit!"

Mike turned to Dustin before they each put their backs to each other so one of them was facing each bully. Mike swooped down and grabbed a rock while Dustin grabbed a stick off the ground.

"S-Stay back!" Mike warned James as he faced towards him with the rock he had grabbed held high, ready to throw it if he needed to.

"Don't come any closer!" Dustin warned Troy while holding his stick out in front of him, brandishing it in defense.

They stood off for a moment, before Mike chucked his rock towards James. It missed by a wide mark, James scoffing at him. "Nice throw, numb nuts." James mocked him before starting to walk closer.

Dustin let out a battle cry before charging at Troy, swinging his stick at the bully who wielded a knife himself. Troy ducked back out of the swing and grabbed Dustin by the shoulders, disarming him of the stick and holding him at knife point.

Dustin grunted as his hands clawed at Troy's arm that pinned him, the knife coming close to his neck as Mike gasped. "Get off! Get off me!" Dustin demanded as he struggled against Troy.

"Let him go! Let him go!" Mike shouted at Troy, who just smiled maliciously his way.

"Stay back, or I cut him! Got it?!" Troy yelled right back at Mike, holding Dustin tighter as he brandished his knife for emphasis.

"What do you want?" Mike asked, his breathing quick as fear filled his chest at seeing Dustin held at knife point like this.

"Well, I want a few things. For one, I want to know where Bright Eyes is, because it wasn't just you that pulled that shit back at the school.

It was both of you! I want to know how you did it!" Troy demanded, barring his teeth angrily at Mike.

"How we did what?" Mike asked, taking a step closer only for Troy to pull his knife closer to Dustin's neck threateningly.

"I know you both did something to us. Some nerdy science shit to make us do that!" Troy growled at Mike, who briefly looked back when James stopped right behind him.

"You mean piss your pants?" Mike retorted, unable to help himself but be smart even knowing Dustin was in serious danger.

"Our friend has superpowers, and she squeezed your tiny bladders with her mind!" Dustin revealed, Troy jerking him back roughly with an insult.

"You know what..." Troy's gaze turned more serious than before, malicious intent more obvious now. "I think I should save Toothless here a trip to the dentist. Help him lose the rest of his baby teeth." Troy threatened, glaring Mike's way as he held his knife tighter.

"Let him go. Let him go!"

"Sure, I'll let him go! But first, it's your turn!" Troy answered, pointing the knife Mike's way for a moment as Dustin panted heavily.

"My turn for what?" Mike asked, trying to come up with some way in his head to get Troy away from Dustin.

"Wet yourself. While we wait for Bright Eyes to show up. She's always around you two, so I know she's out here hiding somewhere!" Troy shouted at Mike angrily, looking around for a moment just in case the little girl was hiding and they just didn't see her.

"What? She's not even out here!" Mike yelled right back at him.

"You're lying, and you're making me lose my patience! I think it's time Toothless loses some teeth!"

"I'M NOT HIDING, GET AWAY FROM THEM NOW!"

A war cry broke the air, Troy and James looking around wildly for half a second before Erin rushed them from out of nowhere.

Erin ran full sprint into James and tackled him to the ground with a yell, slamming her fists into James's face once, twice, three four five times before turning on Troy.

"Stop right there!" Troy warned, pulling Dustin closer and placing the blade of his knife on Dustin's lip in warning. "You take one more step and he loses every last tooth, you bright eyed bitch!" Troy shouted as Erin growled furiously at him.

It was like looking at an entirely different girl than the one they saw at school. Her bright blue eyes were lit aflame with fury, and she just yelled at them and tackled James who is twice her size! What the fuck happened to her?!

Erin either didn't listen, or didn't believe him, because she rushed him like she did James.

Troy was ready though. He threw Dustin down on the ground and pinned him with a foot in time to catch Erin when she tried to do the same thing she did to James, taking her by the shoulders and lifting her insignificant weight with ease. He slammed his knee up into her ribs and threw his free fist into her nose before throwing her back in Mike's direction.

That done, he grabbed Dustin back off the ground and held him at knife point once more.

Mike managed to catch Erin before she could fall when she was tossed his way, looking down at her nose as she hissed in pain before back up at Troy. "You asshole! She's a GIRL!" Dustin roared angrily when he saw blood start to pour from his best friends nose.

"She's a fucking bitch, she's not a girl! You know, I was gonna be nice and take you out in the woods to have some fun when we were done with these two, but you deserve the same thing Wheeler's gonna get, Bright Eyes!" Troy shouted back at the three as Mike held Erin up by the shoulders.

Erin glared his way as she held her quite possibly broken nose.

"You two can go jump!" Troy waved his knife towards the edge of the cliff where the quarry lake laid below. "Do it! Or Toothless here gets an early trip to the dentist!" Troy demanded furiously, James standing back up and moving back behind the two kids with his own nose bleeding profusely.

"Stop! No!"

Troy pulled Dustin closer with a snarling grin, holding the blade in front of his eyes as the toothless boy gasped in fear while watching it lower towards his mouth.

"I will cut him right now!" Troy yelled as Dustin whimpered and tried to turn his face away in fear.

"All right, just hold on! Hold on!" Mike tried to reason, looking between both bullies before turning to Erin.

Her eyes laced with pain and fear, he frowned before leading her with him towards the cliff.

"Guys, don't do it! I don't need my baby teeth, Mike! Erin!" Dustin shouted after them when Erin began to walk with Mike willingly towards the cliffs edge.

"Guys, seriously, don't!"

Mike looked towards the edge of the cliff in fear, the water out around them what felt like hundreds of feet below. Erin's hand wrapped around Mike's as they got closer, holding tight.

Erin was never a fan of open water, so seeing it way down below them once they reached the edge of the cliff made her start to breath quicker in fear.

Once at the edge, the wind began to whip up towards them roughly, blowing their hair and making them sway back on their heels once their shoes reached the edge of the cliff. It only served to increase the fear they each held in their chests as they looked over the edge.

One of them kicked a rock at some point, and it fell down below with a panic inducing clang as it hit a boulder way below.

"Mike, Erin, don't do it!" Dustin shouted at them, desperate as he struggled harder. "Seriously, don't do it, guys! Seriously, don't!" Dustin begged them at this point as James walked over to Troy.

"Troy, I don't think this is a good idea, man." Even James knew it was a bad idea, trying to reason with his best friend who was beyond reason at this point.

"Mike, Erin, Don't!" Dustin cried helplessly as he watched the two stand at the edge of the cliff, holding each others hand hard enough for their fingers to turn white from the pressure.

"Dentist's office opens in five..."

Mike looked to Erin in fear, knowing that if they did this there was a high possibility they wouldn't come back.

"Four!"

Erin started to pant in fear with Mike, knowing the same as he did.

"Three!"

Mike sent her an apologetic look, glad he at least got to see her and know she was alright before his possible end.

"Two!"

"MIKE! ERIN!"

They each took a step closer to one another and wrapped an arm around one another as they braced themselves for what they had to do to protect their friends.

"ONE!"

Mike and Erin took a step over the cliff, plummeting out of sight as their screams echoed throughout the quarry.



Troy let go of Dustin in disbelief, not thinking that they'd actually do it.

Dustin was gasping in shock, not believing that this just happened, his heart pounding frantically.

All three of them ran for the edge of the cliff. They stopped at the edge of the cliff and each one of them gasped at what they saw.

"Holy shit."

Mike and Erin both gasped and whimpered in fear as they floated in mid air above the water that quite possibly could still be their ends.

Mike flailed his arms and legs around in fear, trying to figure out what was going on. He looked to Erin beside him, who only looked back in just as much confusion and fear.

They both let out a scream when they started to raise through the air.

Mike felt like he was being pulled by a rope towards the sky above, Erin spinning around in the air as she tried to reach towards Mike to hold on to.

Mike raised quicker than Erin, reaching the cliff once more, floating over away from it before dropping back down onto solid ground with a grunt at the rough landing.

Erin continued raising higher, gasping in fear and confusion as she tried to figure out what was going on. She kept going higher and higher until she was at least a few feet above the three boys standing on the cliff edge, out of any of their reaches.

"Let me down! What's going on?" Erin cried out, trying to use her arms to reach for Dustin at least but it only resulted in her spinning around mid air.

The four other kids turned away from her when footsteps started to echo towards them. Eleven marched towards the bullies, a glare harsh enough to give nightmares. Eleven was pissed!

When James went to take a step towards Eleven, he was suddenly

shoved to the ground by an invisible force.

Troy snarled in the direction of this new girl, before she cocked her head to the side. A loud crack resonated from his arm before he cried out in excruciating pain as he dropped the knife and held onto his arm.

"She broke my arm! MY ARM!" Troy cried, Dustin and Mike looking at her in awe at how strong she was.

The air around her almost felt electric, showing that no one messes with her friends and gets away with it. She would protect them!

"Go."

The two bullies scrambled to get away, Dustin turning to them with a laugh as all his fear was now gone. "Yeah, that's right! You better run! She's our friend and she's crazy!" Dustin shouted after them with a giddy smile, pointing back at the superhero girl. "You come back here and she'll kill you! You hear me? She'll kill you, you sons of bitches! She'll kill you, you hear me?!"

"Hello? Someone get me down!" Erin broke Dustin out of his rant as he turned to see her still spinning in the air, not yet on the ground like Mike was.

"Oh shit!"

"I'd like to be down on the ground now! You know, down!" Erin yelled as she pointed towards the ground below. Suddenly, she floated further from the cliff's edge and towards Eleven when suddenly whatever force was holding her up released. She dropped to the ground roughly with a grunt, El falling to the ground beside her.

"El are you okay? El?" Mike ran to El who collapsed to the ground, while Dustin ran over to Erin where she fell to help her.

"Mike..." El started to cry, blood flowing from her nose and ears over the overuse of her power. "I'm sorry." El cried, staring up at him as Dustin and Erin moved beside her as well.

"Sorry? What are you sorry for?" Mike asked, confused about what

she had to be sorry for when she just saved their lives.

"The gate... I opened it." El revealed, having to take a moment mid sentence to fight back the sobs. "I'm the monster."

Mike just smiled softly at her. "No. No, El, you're not the monster." Mike assured her as he scooted closer to her.

"You saved us." Erin reminded, patting her on the head gently before collapsing on her side next to El with a pained groan.

"Do you understand? You saved us." Mike continued for Erin, before reaching down and taking El by the arm and pulling her up into a hug. He rested his head on her shoulder while Dustin knelt down to join the hug.

Erin sat back up and pushed her way in as well, her chin resting on El's head as Dustin moved an arm around her.

---

Erin groaned in pain as she crawled through the burrow into Woodlands Realm, El right behind her so they could grab the stuff they left behind in the shelter to bring home with them.

"What the hell is this?" Dustin muttered as he tapped a hand against the weather worn structure, obviously not new.

"This must be the Woodlands Realm I mentioned to you earlier." Mike said before kneeling down to crawl inside with El and Erin.

Dustin sighed before following right behind him.

Erin was in the middle of tossing her things back in her backpack when El took her face into her hands. "Uh... what're you doing?" Erin asked as El's face moved right in front of her.

El looked at the blood pooling above Erin's lip, blinking for a moment. "Blood." El reminded, Erin only snorting at her as she too had blood on her.

"That's what happens when you get punched in the face." Erin advised her, pulling her face away to continue packing up her things.

Mike and Dustin pulled themselves up out of the burrow into the shelter. It was a lot bigger on the inside than they expected from the out.

It was darker inside, the only light coming from the cracks in the curtains hung on the walls. Speaking of the walls...

Papers adorned with drawings littered the walls, some parts of the wall were even drawn on instead of on paper. Most of them were easily recognizable as being from Will, because of how good they were.

There were even old photos stuck to the walls. Mike leaning over to look at one that was of Will and Erin from what looks like a year or two ago standing in front of the shelter, grinning at the camera.

Dustin looked at another, that was of Erin posed next to a passed out Will who had marker all over his face.

"How long have you guys been coming here? When did you guys even have time to build this?" Mike asked, looking down at the old blankets and pillows all over the floor around them.

"I think we were like ten?" Erin questioned it herself, not too sure as they've all been friends so long. "Dustin had been around for a while at that point, so I'm going with ten. We did it during the end of summer, so we took like three days to do it." Erin revealed as she zipped up her backpack now that she had everything again.

"How the hell didn't we know about this?" Dustin asked, genuinely surprised that none of them ever noticed when Will and Erin would be away.

"Will and I promised each other that this would be our place." Erin revealed, her eyes softening as she realized she not only broke her promise once, but twice now by allowing the boys to know about it.

Mike frowned, seeing the look in her eyes. "It still will be your place. We're going to find him, and I'm sure he will understand that it was important and that's why others know about it now." Mike assured her, taking her hand and squeezing it until he noticed her flinch.

"What's wrong?" Dustin was the first to ask, crawling over to her and taking the hand that Mike squeezed. Flipping it over, he saw the purple coloring that began to shine against her skin.

"Guess that was from me beating up James..." Erin mused with a sheepish smile.

"By the way, that was bad ass. I never expected you to go full Elf fury for us." Dustin mused as he took his backpack off and dug through it for his first aid kit.

"They were threatening you both. They had you at knife point. I couldn't just... hide... I had to do something. Too bad it wasn't enough..." Erin trailed off as the three kids in the room watched how she shrank in on herself.

"You were strong." El assured Erin, wanting to say so much more but not sure what could help right now.

"Are you kidding me? She wasn't just strong, she was fucking bad ass! She beat the shit out of James, and then tried tackling Troy when he had a damn knife! You tried to tackle a guy with a knife to save me! That's beyond bad ass and if we weren't basically siblings I'd kiss you for trying so hard to save me!" Everyone's eyes widened and zeroed on Dustin for what he just said.

"What did you just say?" Mike asked his best friend, a cat like grin spreading on his face at this new dirt he now could use against Dustin.

Erin's face was stained red as her eyes locked with Dustin, who just opened his mouth and stuttered a few times in embarrassment before she moved past him to leave the Woodland Realm.

"W-wait! No, I said we were siblings! I said I wouldn't!" Dustin tried to cover up his blunder as Erin went down into the burrow exit.

"What's kiss?" Eleven asked, now both boys a blushing mess as Mike really didn't want to explain romantic stuff to El.

"Wait! Erin I didn't clean your damn nose of the blood!" Dustin called after Erin, not wanting to explain to El either what a kiss was. He

scurried off after her as Mike snickered beside El.

When El looked to him expecting an answer of her question, his laughter died with a nervous chuckle.

---

The four finally made their way back to Mike's basement, where Mike immediately told both girls it was time to get them cleaned up. El and Mike went into the bathroom, to much snickering from Erin and Dustin.

"Come on, let me see your nose." Dustin said after pulling out his first aid kit again.

Erin had been laying on the couch when Dustin tried to act like a nurse again, groaning dramatically. "I'm tired, I slept in the woods all night. I don't wanna..." Erin whined, rolling over away from Dustin instead.

"Erin..." Dustin wasn't discussing this. It was going to happen.

"Mmm..." Erin only whined more, still not moving.

Dustin sighed before sitting on the edge of the couch and forcing her to roll over. When she struggled against him, he pinned her down by the shoulder and used his other hand to hold her by the chin. "Not letting you have a choice." Dustin said firmly, letting go of her shoulder to grab a wet wipe to get rid of the dried blood that went down to her chin now.

"Ugh, fine Mom." Erin complained, going slack to allow him to do as he wanted and clean her up.

Dustin held Erin's chin while he gently wiped the blood away. They remained quiet, in their own thoughts as he helped her clean up. Usually, any other time she'd get hurt it would be Mike or Will helping her. Or she'd help any of them if they got hurt.

It was different being the one getting to fix her up.

"What do you think they're doing in there?" Erin asked, voice low and gossipy as she pointed towards the bathroom door.

Dustin looked back in the direction of the bathroom before back down at her. "I'd say... he's finally gonna try to kiss her. You know, because it's so obvious that he likes her." Dustin gossiped with her, laughing when she snorted and giggled at him.

"Should we barge in and embarrass him?" Erin asked after another moment of him cleaning blood off of her.

"Yeah I think we should." Dustin agreed, helping her up once he finished with wiping away her blood.

Erin winced when she sat up, Dustin noticing it with her facial reaction. "Don't." Erin said when he went to poke at her stomach.

"Do you think he broke a rib?" Dustin asked as Erin held a hand to her sore ribs.

"If he did there's nothing we can do about it. Broken or cracked ribs are untreatable, the only thing that can be done for them being lots of rest and time. Oh and pain relievers." Erin explained, Dustin a little surprised at her medical knowledge since she never really showed it before.

"I can get you an ice pack." Dustin offered, jabbing a thumb towards the stairs.

"No, it's fine. It'll heal. Let's go embarrass Mike." Erin smirked deviously, before moving quickly for the bathroom door for an injured girl.

The two each pressed an ear to the bathroom door. "Still pretty?" El's voice was the first thing they heard.

"Yeah! Pretty. Really pretty." Mike answered her words, Erin and Dustin exchanging teasing smiles at what they were hearing already.

"El?"

"Yes?"

"U-um, I'm happy you're home." Mike said softly, Erin almost awing if it hadn't been for Dustin paying attention and covering her mouth.

"Me, too."

When silence overtook them, they each reached for the doorknob.

"Yo!"

Mike and Eleven jerked apart as Erin and Dustin appeared in the doorway, looking bewildered towards them at their sudden intrusion.

"You're both cleaned up, good. No more getting bloodied." Dustin playfully chastised the two girls, Mike glaring at them both when he realized what they were actually up to.

Mike went to open his mouth and embarrass Dustin back, when the four heard Mike's super comm out on the table crackle loudly with the sound of someone trying to get a hold of them.

"That's gotta be Lucas." Erin said before they all ran out of the bathroom to see what was going on with him.

"Shit... shit he might be in trouble. Remember how he said he was looking for the gate?" Dustin asked Mike, grabbing the radio once they reached the table.

"Yeah?"

"What if he found it?" Dustin asked, Lucas's voice in the radio warbled and unintelligible.

"He's out of range." Erin advised, Mike taking the super comm from Dustin.

"... son of a bitch!"

"Lucas, if you can hear us, slow down. We can't understand you." Mike answered him back, hoping that Lucas will get in range to them quick.

Lucas continued shouting in the radio, the four trying desperately to understand him. Whatever it was, it was important from how much he was shouting.



"Mad hen? What is that? Like a code name or something?" Dustin asked, Mike gesturing to him to be quiet for a moment.

"The bad men are coming!" That came in crystal clear.

"Bad men. Bad men!" Mike realized now what Lucas was warning them about. "Stay here." Mike said to El before putting down the radio and running off. Dustin and Erin followed him up the stairs.

Once up there, they looked out the window to see a van sitting on the street. The driver inside watching them creepily. "What's that guy doing?" Mike questioned, turning to his two friends.

"You don't think..." Mike ran off to go back to El as they finally began to realize just how much trouble they were in. When Dustin and Erin watched more of the power vans pulling up, their eyes widened. Dustin immediately yanked the curtains shut.

"Mike!" The two ran to go get Mike so they could get out of there while they still have a chance. "We need to leave... right now." Dustin said once they reached Mike, who's eyes widened when he realized by their panicked faces there was more coming.

"Michael!" Mrs. Wheeler yelled after her son.

"If anyone asks where I am, I've left the country!" Mike said to his Mom before racing off to go get El so they could run while they still have a chance.

"What?!"

Running back downstairs, they all grabbed their things and warned Eleven on the way out. Running out the back door, they grabbed their bikes and made a run for it.

Once they reached the street, they turned to see all of the Hawkins powers vans lining the street. Along with all the people walking up towards the house. The people stopped when they saw them, one white haired man making direct eye contact with El as she got on Mike's bike.

"Go! Go! Go!" The kids took off as fast as they could away from the

bad men.

---

*The Bad Men are coming! The Bad Men are coming! Also the end of season 1 is coming! Already the end of season 1 is coming!*

*Wow though, that fight at the quarry huh? I'm actually considering doing a side chapter of that whole situation from the views of Erin and Eleven, since they showed up late. But it would probably not be until after season 1 is done. Also if there's enough demand for it I'd probably be more apt to do it though.*

*Erin and Dustin are the most childish pair at times though, aren't they? Interrupting Mike and El's intimate moment like that? They could have kissed, you know?! Why couldn't you have let them kiss?!*

*Thank you all so much for still reading! I'm editing this at like quarter to four in the morning, so I'm going to bed. Thanks again!*

## 10. On The Run

"Out of the way! Out of the way!" Dustin yelled as the four kids controlling bikes rode through a playground full speed, two girls who were playing patty cake jumping out of the way when they shot past.

They continued to race in the direction that Lucas told them to meet up with him at, reaching the streets once more just in time to see Lucas racing in their direction. They peeled to a stop once all regrouped again. "Lucas!" Mike was so happy to see Lucas was alright.

"Where are they?" Lucas asked, gasping for breath from the fast ride.

"We don't know." Erin answered, looking around wildly for the Hawkins Power vans.

"I think we lost them." Dustin offered, pushing the mic of his headset up out of his face now that Lucas was here.

The sound of tires screeching across pavement nearby told them they hadn't lost them just yet. The vans flew around a corner down the street, coming back for them.

"Go, go, go, go, go!"

Dustin, Erin and Lucas all screamed as they peddled after Mike for their lives, trying their hardest to get away from the vans.

El looked back behind her, briefly making eye contact with Erin right behind her before at the vans that kept getting closer and closer.

"Faster, faster!"

"Shit, shit, shit, shit, shit!"

Suddenly, a van raced around a corner in front of them. It was heading right for them!

Dustin and Lucas screamed as Erin and El's eyes widened at the fact that they were now cut off.

Erin had pulled up next to Mike and El when El reached over and placed a hand on her shoulder. "What're you..."

Erin followed El's gaze towards the van coming straight for them, eyes widening when it got too close. Suddenly, it was like the van hit a wall before it flipped over them in the air. With a resounding crash and crunch of metal, it slammed back down on the ground behind them. It blocked their path against the other vans chasing them.

The boys and Erin looked around, amazed at what had just happened, but they continued racing off away from the Bad Men.

Unbeknownst to them, the white haired man stepped out of the car and made eye contact with El as they got away.

They won't get far.

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The now five arrived at the junkyard after a while, Mike helping El off the back of his bike as she was weakened from throwing the van. She sat on the ground as the other three rolled up next to them.

"Holy... Holy shit! Did... did you see what she did to that van?" Dustin asked, trying to catch his breath after the long and physically demanding ride.

"No, Dustin, we missed it." Mike answered sarcastically, sitting down beside El to check her nose and ears for blood.

"I- I mean that was..." Dustin stammered, amazed by how strong El truly was.

"Awesome." Lucas and Erin both said at the same time, Lucas looking her way only for her to ignore him and walk over to El.

"It was awesome." Lucas continued, trying not to let Erin's obvious ignorance of him get to him. Still trying to catch his own breath, he walked over to El and knelt down beside her. "Everything I said about you being a traitor and stuff... I was wrong." Lucas admitted, poking a finger against his own chest.

El stared back at him, a bit surprised by his sudden change of heart.

Mike started to wipe the blood from her ears, but she kept her eyes on Lucas.

"I'm sorry." Lucas apologized at last, placing a hand on Eleven's shoulder as her eyes softened even more.

"Friends..." El began, feeling the urge to cry and suppressing it. "Friends don't lie. I'm sorry, too." Eleven apologized as well, Lucas smiling back at her for what felt like the first time.

"I'm sorry too." Mike joined in as he finished cleaning the blood off of El's ears. He extended his hand to Lucas, who reached over and shook it tightly.

El looked towards Erin beside her to see if she would be next, only to widen her eyes when she noticed blood dripping from her nose. "Blood." El pointed towards Erin's face, who tilted her head towards her in confusion.

"What?" Erin asked, before El leaned over and pressed a finger into the blood trail that ran down to her chin. "What the hell?" Erin questioned when El presented her bloodied finger for her to see.

"Shit, your nose must be broken." Mike said as he scrambled over to Erin to help her, who just looked even more confused.

"Broken? How did you break your nose?" Lucas asked, but Erin looked to Mike instead as he began to wipe her nose clean for her and ignored him again.

Dustin jabbed an elbow in Lucas's ribs, nodding his head towards Erin to remind Lucas he had one more hand to shake.

Lucas sighed, knowing he needed to but also knowing how Erin when mad was not fun to try to reason with. He knelt down beside Erin as Mike cleaned her up, finally earning her gaze. "I'm sorry for what I said. I know how much you care about Will, I know you would never try to replace him or forget about him." Lucas began, keeping his eyes on Erin's as he tried to find the right things to say.

Erin's anger cracked though almost as soon as he mentioned he was sorry.

"Will's your closest friend, I mean we've all kind of been assuming you two are together at this point, so I'm sorry for using Will to hurt you." Lucas apologized, holding his hand out to Erin to fix what they started.

Erin's eyes filled with confusion at what he said instead. "Together? Will and I? Are you joking?" Erin asked, before suddenly beginning to laugh at what Lucas said like it was the funniest thing in the world. "He's my brother, you idiot. Just like the rest of you!" Erin said through her laughter, Mike and Dustin exchanging a look over how odd this apology was going.

"Oh please, you two are joined at the hip!" Lucas argued, starting to laugh with her now.

"That doesn't mean I wanna kiss him!" Erin argued back, before her laughter died down after a moment. "I'm sorry too, for yelling at you and losing my temper. I saw how you treated El, and it just reminded me-"

"Of when you got here." Lucas finished for her, frowning a little because he had that memory buried deep down. The early days of Erin's arrival to Hawkins were not some of the greatest when it came to how she was treated for being new.

"Yeah..." Erin trailed off, before reaching her hand out and firmly shaking Lucas's. "I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry."

Lucas squeezed her hand right back, as their feud finally came to an end.

With that done, and all of them on good terms once more, they got back to the more important matter at hand.

Lucas placed some sticks on the ground to represent the fence that surrounded the lab they needed to somehow get to. "This is Randolph Road, right here." Lucas explained, pointing at one side of the shape as everyone surrounded his diagram. "The fence starts here, and goes all the way around." Lucas circled the sticks with the one he was

using to illustrate.

"And this is the lab right here." Lucas placed a can in the middle of the formation to show where they needed to be. "The gate's gotta be in there somewhere. It's gotta be."

"Well, who owns Hawkins Lab?" Dustin asked, looking among them for an answer.

"It's owned by the department of energy. Will and I used to run past there all the time when out in Mirkwood." Erin answered, frowning because she remembered how high those fences were. Not to mention the barbed wire that they were peaked with.

"Department of Energy? What do you think that means?" Dustin asked, not sure if that meant it was just a power company or if it was bigger.

"It means government. Military." Mike answered, feeling like they were in for a big struggle if they were going to try to break into a military guarded building.

"Then why does it say 'Energy'?" Dustin asked, always full of questions.

"Just trust me, alright? It's military. My dad's told me before." Mike revealed, not up for a debate with Dustin right now.

"Mike's gotta be right. Look at all that back there, how organized those vans were, strategic almost? Only something that's military ran and soldier backed could work that smooth." Erin reasoned, having enough strategic interests herself to know that wasn't just some power company sending their workers out after them.

"Do they make, like, light-bulbs or something?" Dustin asked next, not seeing what a department of energy could possibly need with soldiers.

"No, weapons..." Mike answered while pinching the bridge of his nose. "To fight the Russians, and commies and stuff."

"Weapons." Lucas muttered as he looked directly at El, before to each

of his friends as everything began to make sense. They started to become more afraid at this realization.

"Oh, Jesus, this is bad."

"Really bad. The place is like a fortress." Lucas revealed, Erin humming in agreement.

"Well, what do we do?"

"I don't know, but we can't go home. We're fugitives now." Mike reminded them, since there had to be no doubt that those soldiers would be watching each of their houses.

Dustin and Erin both turned away as the sound of a helicopter floated across the wind towards them. "G-guys?" Dustin muttered, fear starting to settle in more at the idea that this helicopter might be looking for them.

"Do you hear that?" Erin asked the others, looking around quickly for any sign.

All five of them spotted it at the same time, a helicopter in the distance. Heading right their ways.

"Go, go, go, go!" Mike rushed everyone to hide their bikes beneath an old bus.

Once everything was hidden, they all ran inside of the bus and ducked down as the helicopter got closer and closer.

"Get down!" Erin hissed, everyone ducking out of sight of the windows as the helicopter passed over them. Each of their eyes was on the roof above them, waiting with bated breath to see if they were caught or if it would leave.

"Mental." Dustin whispered as the sound surrounded them all.

Erin peeked out of a window as Erin sat beside her, barely seeing the shadow of the helicopter on the ground before ducking back down.

El locked eyes with her when she was crouched back down beside



her. "We're playing a waiting game." Lucas muttered, hiding on the other side of the bus from the girls.

Mike was a seat in front of Erin and El, while Dustin sat across the aisle from them. Mike looked like he was trying to shrink himself to hide easier, while Dustin just sat and listened to the helicopter. Waiting for it to leave.

"It's better than risking them finding us." Mike said in response to Lucas's comment.

"We might be stuck here a while though. The chopper is searching, so if they're military they're going to be thorough." Erin clarified, moving out of her seat and onto the floor instead where she would be better hidden.

El moved into the same position beside her, pressing her hands against the seat in front of them.

"Your nose?" El asked Erin quietly, Erin looking to her and away from the window.

"It's fine, doesn't hurt too much." Erin muttered, gently touching the skin of her nose as touching it only makes it worse.

El moved her head to the side, and Erin pulled back in confusion as to what she was doing. She was fine, she didn't need to be coddled by everyone.

"*Mike, are you there?*" Everyone flinched when a voice garbled with static broke the relative silence of the old bus, looking towards Mike's backpack near the front. "*Mike?*" That was Nancy's voice, Mike must have brought his super comm with him.

"You guys here that?" Dustin asked, Mike and him crawling towards Mike's backpack.

"*Mike, it's me, Nancy.*"

Mike picked up his backpack and hurriedly opened it as the other four surrounded him, pulling out his super comm as Nancy spoke again. "*Mike, are you there? Answer!*"

*"Mike, we need you to answer."*

"Is that your sister?" Lucas asked, almost not believing it that Nancy of all people was trying to get a hold of them.

*"This is an emergency, Mike."* Everyone leaned closer at that one phrase. *"Do you copy?"*

*"Mike, do you copy?"*

"Okay, this is really weird." Dustin muttered, leaning on the seat behind Mike who held up the super comm.

"What emergency could she be talking about?" Erin questioned, moving to sit in front of Mike.

Lucas grabbed for the super comm to respond to Nancy, but Mike yanked it away. "Don't answer." Mike warned him.

"She said it was an emergency." Lucas reminded him, knowing they couldn't just sit around if there's an emergency and Nancy needs their help.

"What if it's a trick?" Mike asked instead of considering answering his sister.

"It's your sister!"

"What if the bad people kidnapped her? What if they're forcing her to say this?"

"Both of you, stop." Erin interrupted them, focusing on the super comm when it crackled again.

*"I need you to answer."*

"It's like Lando Calrissian. Don't answer!" Dustin sided with Mike now as Erin accidentally pinched the bridge of her nose in frustration, hissing in pain.

*"We need to know that you're there, Mike."*

"Mike, what if it's your family?" Erin questioned, leaning closer to him. "What if Nancy needs help, and we're the only ones that haven't been caught so we're their only hope? You can't just ignore your family!" Erin reminded him, not having much of a family herself but she considered all of them her family. She would do anything for them if they needed her.

*"Listen, kid, this is the chief."* Chief Hopper's voice broke through the super comm seconds later. *"If you're there, pick up. We know you're in trouble and we know about the girl."* Mike and Erin's eyes snapped to El, who looked frightened when she realized she was the girl this chief was talking about.

"Why is she with the chief?" Lucas wondered aloud, having thought Chief Hopper would be looking for Will right now.

"How the hell does he know about..." Dustin cocked his head in El's direction.

*"We can protect you, we can help you, but you gotta pick up. Are you there? Do you copy? Over."* Chief Hopper's voice seemed to get louder the longer he spoke, showing to them that he was really trying to reach them as hard as he could.

Mike exchanged a look with each of his friends as he weighed in his head the risk of answering the super comm. Finally, he lifted the super comm to his mouth. "Yes, I copy."

"It's Mike, I'm here. We're here."

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Dustin paced anxiously back and forth in the bus, while the others stood around waiting on the Chief. Mike and Lucas sat at one end of the bus, while Erin and El were at the other.

"Why is he doing that?" El asked, nodding her head towards Dustin.

"He's worried. Dustin paces when worried. He also screams or says oh my god a lot." Erin explained, leaning her head back against the back of the driver seat.

Each step Dustin took seemed to send a boom throughout the bus,

only serving to annoy the other four.

"How is your nose now?" El asked, turning back to Erin to try to ignore the pacing toothless boy.

"Will you stop pacing?"

"It's fine, El. I'm fine." Erin repeated the same thing to her once again, getting fed up quick.

"It's been way too long." Dustin spoke to Mike while El kept her eyes on Erin. "You know what? Maybe you're right. Maybe this is all a trap, and the bad men are coming to get us right now!" Dustin's voice rose higher and higher as he continued.

"Please... stop... shouting. My head is hurting, my nose is probably broken, my ribs are probably cracked. Do not add to my list." Erin growled from the other side of the bus.

"It's not a trap. Why would the chief set us up?" Erin was ignored, though. At least by the boys. El reached over and patted her on the shoulder while Erin rubbed her temples with her index knuckles. "Nancy, maybe, but the chief?"

Mike threw his hands in the air in response to his sister being insulted so flagrantly when she was trying to help them. "Lando Calrissian." Dustin reminded Lucas, continuing his pacing.

"Would you shut up about Lando?" Lucas asked, his voice beginning to raise now too.

"I don't feel good about this. I don't feel good about this!"

"When do you feel good about anything?!"

Erin had enough, jumping off the drivers seat with a thud that shook the entire bus. "Enough! Shouting and pacing and arguing isn't helping us at all! All you're doing is freaking yourselves out more!" Erin shouted herself now, even considering her growing headache.

Lucas and Dustin both turned to her, opening their mouths to argue back when suddenly they all heard the sound of a vehicle

approaching them.

They all ran towards the front of the bus to look and see if it was finally the chief. Instead, it was two dark cars that they didn't recognize. "Shit!"

"Go, go, go, go." Everyone ran back to the back of the bus where they had originally been hiding, ducking down and praying that they wouldn't be found.

"Lando." Dustin said, gasping for breath from the rush.

"You think they saw us?" Lucas asked, turning to Mike and El at the back of the bus before back to Dustin and Erin across the aisle from him.

"Both of you, shut up." Mike hissed at them, seconds later hearing the sound of car doors shutting.

All five of them shrunk into their hiding spots, fear racing through them over the possibility of being caught by the bad men.

The longest minute of their life passed when they heard the creak of the bus door. El pulled Mike towards her in fear of what could happen to him, burying her face against his shoulder. Erin moved back into Dustin beside her, who pulled her further into himself and away from the aisle.

A grunt rang out through the bus, followed afterwards by a thud. "Hey!" What sounded like punches and grunts followed, even more thuds as all five kids looked over their seats in fear of what was happening.

"What the-" A shout and grunt followed again, another thud.

The door creaked open again, and they all stood up when they saw their heavily breathing Chief step into the bus. "Alright, let's go." Chief Hopper said, holding his pistol in hand and looking worse for wear than the last time they all saw him.

They all stared at him for a moment in disbelief. Did Chief Hopper just take down a bunch of the bad men alone?

"Let's go!"

They didn't need to be told again, they all grabbed their things and ran after their savior, Chief Hopper.

They all tossed their things in Chief Hoppers cars trunk before piling in, a tight squeeze but anything was better than running on foot or biking again after earlier.

The ride with Chief Hopper felt long, the sun setting and casting them into darkness, but it gave them each a much needed moment to take a breather.

Lucas and Erin were sat next to each other, both smirking as they looked towards Mike and El. El had her head on Mike's shoulder for a portion of the ride now.

Lucas raised his eyebrows a few times at Erin, Erin winking and making kissing faces as they both nodded towards the other two.

Before long, they all recognized where they were pulling into. The Byers House.

The five got out of the car the moment it stopped. "Mike. Oh, my god. Mike!" Nancy was running towards them, swooping Mike up in a hug much to the boys relief at seeing she was safe. "I was so worried about you." Nancy said once she pulled back.

"Yeah, uh... me, too." Mike said back, a bit awkwardly since they were never very affectionate with one another.

Nancy looked down at him for a moment, before past him at the girl she hadn't yet seen. "Is that the dress I helped Erin pick out?" Nancy asked, smiling slightly as Erin herself took an innocent look upon her at Nancy revealing she helped her pick out the dress.

Eleven looked to Erin before the other boys, then back at Nancy as she wasn't sure how to respond.

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Mike explained the concept of the Flea and the Acrobat to Nancy, Jonathan, Chief Hopper and Will's mom Joyce. "Mr. Clarke said the

only way to get there is through a rip of time and space."

"A gate."

"That we tracked to Hawkins Lab."

"With our compasses." The three boys spoke one after another, explaining the situation and what they've learned so far.

Joyce looked at them, completely lost as to what they were talking about. She knew that this... monster... had her boy. But a gate to a different dimension?

"Okay, so the gate has a really strong electromagnetic field, and that can change the directions of a compass needle." Dustin was always willing to explain anything, fortunately for the others that hadn't been with them on this adventure so far.

"Is this gate underground?" Hopper asked from where he sat in the armchair, remembering seeing something when he was inside the Lab that could possibly be this gate they were talking about.

"Yes." Eleven answered, surprising her friends as she was so open and willing to speak for a change.

"Near a large water tank?" Hopper further asked, his eyes locked with Eleven's, the girl who he knew was the kidnapped girl from the lab now that he had been chasing instead of Will.

"Yes." Eleven answered with a small nod of her head.

"H-how do you know all that?" Dustin stammered, confused on why the chief knew so much when they barely knew where the gate was.

"He's seen it." Mike answered, realizing that Hopper had physically seen the gate already.

"Is... is there any way that you could... that you could reach Will? That you could talk to him in this-"

"The Upside Down." Eleven cut Mrs. Byers off with the name of the place Will was hiding. Eleven nodded her head to let her know that

yes, she could speak to Will there.

"And my friend, Barbara? Can you find her, too?" Nancy asked, and received the same answer from El.

El sat down at a table with two pictures of the people she was looking for, trying to find them in the void. Trying to reach them. But... she couldn't find them. She couldn't reach them, like she reached Will before. "I'm sorry." El apologized softly, eyes watering up at how she couldn't do it. "I... I can't find them."

Eleven stood in the bathroom of the house with tears dripping down her face, cursing her weakness. She needed to be strong, she needed to help them. How was she supposed to help them?

She turned the water faucet of the sink on and ran her hands under it, collecting the water and wiping it over her face. When her eyes opened again, she saw the worn down blue eyed girl behind her in the reflection of the mirror.

"You okay?" Erin asked quietly, leaning on the frame of the door.

"I- I need to be stronger." Eleven responded, turning around to face Erin.

"You are strong, El. You're just tired, you just need time to rest." Erin reminded, not for a second believing that this girl who threw a van was weak.

"You're strong. I want to be strong too." El said with a shake of her head, confused when Erin snorted.

"I'm sorry, I'm strong? Look at my face." Erin pointed up at her heavily bruised nose. "I got punched in the face and kneed in the ribs. If I were strong, I would have hurt him too." Erin continued, leaning away from the door frame. "You threw a van!"

El smiled softly at Erin. "You helped."

"How did I help, I didn't use my mind to throw a super heavy vehicle like thirty feet." Erin reminded her as she took a step closer.



"Your strength." El said simply, wanting to say so much more but from knowing Erin in this short amount of time, she doesn't think Erin would understand or believe it because she simply didn't think she was strong.

Erin snorted again, the sound even sounding painful to Eleven with Erin's injury. "So, you have any other ideas on how to reach Will and Barbara?" Erin asked as El turned around to turn off the water she had forgotten about.

El's eyes caught on the bathtub beside the sink, coming up with an idea. She didn't like it, but it was the only way.

"Yes, I have an idea. The bathtub." Eleven answered, staring at what could be her last chance of reaching their friends in the Upside Down.

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*Is it just me, or did this end feel a little rushed? I might increase chapter lengths I think, would make sense since each episode is almost an hour. Let me know how yall would feel about me extending the length of each chapter. I personally have no issues making them longer.*

*We're so close to finding Will, now! The bad men are on their trail, they've gotta hurry! I'm actually a little sad that this ones already almost done. Don't worry, I'm gonna write for two and three as well.*

*Question, I haven't been able to decide yet. Yall notice I number each chapter with season and episode for reference purposes. Do you guys think I should just keep all three seasons right here in this one story, or break them apart into separate stories for each season? Please, let me know how you guys feel about this.*

*Thank you guys so much for reading! Thank you for sticking around this long and an even bigger thank you for sticking around after that rocky start. I'm gonna go start the next exciting chapter, see you then!*